Be Wary of Treacherous Black Ice

Black ice – a natural winter phenomenon that has sent many a driver skidding and sliding down what looked like a dry road.

What we call black ice is sleet or rain or melted snow that freezes as a sheet and is not visible as ice. The road looks the same as it always does, which is why it’s so hard to detect.

What can a driver do to prepare for black ice?

Look for signs of ice other than on the roadway. That means looking for ice on windshield wipers or sideview mirrors, on road signs, trees or fences along the highway. If ice is forming on any of those things, it’s possible that it may be on the road as well.

Then again, ice might not have formed on anything but the road. For example, it may have been a warm day during which the snow melted and then froze as ice after the temperature dropped at night. In other cases, there will be ice in shaded areas, such as cuts through hills and along banks, before there will be ice on the open roads. If you suspect there could be black ice on the pavement, you may want to test for it by gently wiggling the steering a little bit or by applying the brakes lightly to see if there’s any change in the feel of the road.

Black ice is also one of the winter hazards that four-wheel drive cannot overcome. Some of us get complacent because we have four-wheel drive. However, you need to be just as careful as the motorist who has a rear-wheel drive vehicle when it comes to ice on the roadway.

Black ice on bridges and overpasses can cause additional problems. Instances of cars skidding and tumbling off of overpasses occur every winter season.

More Winter Driving Tips

Allow for greater stopping distance during storms. In order to bring your car to a safe stop, you must allow 8-10 seconds between you and the vehicle in front of you.

When driving uphill on ice, pick a path that will allow the most traction. Monitor vehicles in front of you and steer clear of areas where they spin wheels or slide backward.

To maintain control on curves and turns, reduce speed just before the turn. Any sudden acceleration or deceleration during a turn will send you into a skid. It may be safer to gear down, especially when going downhill.

Never brake while driving on ice. If you are approaching a patch of ice, brake during your approach. Applying pressure to your brakes while on ice will only throw you into a skid.

Travel gently. Everything you do on icy roads will affect how your vehicle handles the situation. Move slowly. Turn slowly. Brake slowly. Sudden changes can cause your car to spin out of control.

Black ice can present a great threat to your safety – it is unlike any other road hazard. When black ice conditions exist, keep a safe distance from other drivers. If possible, avoid driving at all when road conditions are hazardous.