Winter Driving Safety Talk

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Driving safely in winter weather can be a challenge for even the most experienced driver. It’s easy to forget after months of mild conditions that snow and ice demand careful driving and special preparation for your vehicle. 17 percent of all vehicle crashes occur during winter conditions.

Winter is the perfect time to build crackling fires, hit the slopes, and snuggle up with a nice cup of cocoa. It also creates some of the most treacherous road conditions.

Snow and ice make even the most routine drive dangerous. Before winter weather arrives, make sure your vehicle is in good condition, keep in mind how you and your vehicle may be affected by the elements and be prepared for emergency situations.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

People are killed and are injured each year by auto accidents that occur on snowy, icy, or slushy roads.

Roadways in Northern climes are subject to snow and other winter conditions.

Safe winter driving requires an abundance of caution, with defensive driving techniques employed and extra vigilance behind the wheel. Common sense practices – like never using a phone while driving and always wearing a seatbelt – are all the more important, while speeding and aggressive driving are especially dangerous.

Being an alert, defensive driver while on the road is critical for winter driving safety, but so too are the ways in which you prepare and care for your vehicle during the colder months. Depending on where you live and the types of roads on which you

drive, winter driving may call for everything from different tires to different wiper blades to different fluids in the engine.

DRIVING DANGERS

Loss of Traction

Snow makes roads extremely slick and slippery, so when you're driving in the snow it's easy to lose control of your vehicle when it loses traction. This means your wheels can slide out of control and you're at high risk of getting into an accident or collision.

Limited Visibility

Gray days and snowfall can make for seriously limited visibility when driving in the snow. This makes it difficult for you to navigate your surroundings and see what drivers around you are doing, putting you at a higher probability of getting into an accident.

Vehicle Malfunction

Cold weather can take a serious toll on your car, messing with the fluids under the hood as well as the durability of your car's tires. You could wind up with a fluid freeze or a blowout if you're not careful.

Rust

Snowy roads get salted to help melt the snow and ice and give you better traction. However, as you drive on salted roads the salt gets flung up onto your vehicle, and this can eat the paint and cause rust.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Severe weather can be both frightening and dangerous for travelers. Winter storms, bad weather and sloppy road conditions are a factors in crashes and fatalities every winter.

COLD WEATHER DRIVING TIPS

- Keep a bundle of cold-weather gear in your car, such as extra food and water, warm clothing, a flashlight, a glass scraper, blankets, medications, and more.
- Make certain your tires are properly inflated and have plenty of tread.
- Keep at least half a tank of fuel in your vehicle at all times.

TIPS FOR DRIVING IN THE SNOW

- **Stay home**. Only go out if necessary. Even if you can drive well in bad weather, it's better to avoid taking unnecessary risks by venturing out.
- **Drive slowly**. Always adjust your speed down to account for lower traction when driving on snow or ice.
- **Accelerate and decelerate slowly**. Apply the gas slowly to regain traction and avoid skids. Don't try to get moving in a hurry and take time to slow down for a stoplight. Remember: It takes longer to slow down on icy roads.
- **Increase your following distance** to five to six seconds. This increased margin of safety will provide the longer distance needed if you have to stop.
- **Know your brakes**. Whether you have antilock brakes or not, keep the heel of your foot on the floor and use the ball of your foot to apply firm, steady pressure on the brake pedal.
- **Don't stop if you can avoid it**. There's a big difference in the amount of inertia it takes to start moving from a full stop versus how much it takes to get moving while still rolling. If you can slow down enough to keep rolling until a traffic light changes, do it.
- **Don't power up hills**. Applying extra gas on snow-covered roads will just make your wheels spin. Try to get a little inertia going before you reach the hill and let that inertia carry you to the top. As you reach the crest of the hill, reduce your speed and proceed downhill slowly.
- **Don't stop going up a hill**. There's nothing worse than trying to get moving up a hill on an icy road. Get some inertia going on a flat roadway before you take on the hill.

TIPS FOR LONG-DISTANCE WINTER TRIPS

- **Be Prepared**: Have your vehicle checked by a AAA Approved Auto Repair facility before hitting the road.
- **Check the Weather:** Check the weather along your route and when possible, delay your trip if bad weather is expected.
- **Stay Connected:** Before hitting the road, notify others and let them know your route, destination and estimated time of arrival.
- **IF YOU GET STUCK IN THE SNOW:**
- **Stay with your vehicle**: Your vehicle provides temporary shelter and makes it easier for rescuers to locate you. Do not try to walk in a severe storm. It is easy to lose sight of your vehicle in blowing snow and become lost.
- **Don’t over exert yourself:** When digging out your vehicle, listen to your body and stop if you become tired.
- **Be Visible:** Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna of your vehicle or place a cloth at the top of a rolled up window to signal distress. At night, keep the dome light on if possible. It only uses a small amount of electricity and will make it easier for rescuers to find you.
- **Clear the Exhaust Pipe:** Make sure the exhaust pipe is not clogged with snow, ice or mud. A blocked exhaust pipe can cause deadly carbon monoxide gas to leak into the passenger compartment of the vehicle while the engine is running.
- **Stay Warm:** Use whatever is available to insulate your body from the cold. This could include floor mats, newspapers or paper maps. Pre-pack blankets and heavy clothing to use in case of an emergency.
- **Conserve Fuel:** If possible, only run the engine and heater long enough to remove the chill. This will help to conserve fuel.

FINAL WORD

Winter driving demands special care; safe driving is a year-round habit. You and everyone in your vehicle should be wearing seat belts for every ride. Children should be in age- and size-appropriate child seats. Never drive after drinking. Never drive when distracted by an electronic device or anything else. Those

are the essentials for safe driving, whatever the weather.