

## Tips On Winter Driving

As we enter the winter season, it is necessary for all drivers to increase their awareness of the seasonal hazards, and the defenses that a good defensive driver must apply.

Most drivers tend to drive too fast – turn too sharp – and brake too late. Every year, during the first snow/ice event, drivers have to relearn the skills used last winter.

Perhaps the most significant hazard you will encounter is the driver who makes little or no adjustment for the increased hazardous conditions.

Remember that a 4-wheel drive vehicle may be fine for mud, rain, or even snow, but is no better on ice than any other vehicle.

### 1. Winterize

- **Antifreeze** - To prevent freezing and corrosion, maintain engine coolant at proper levels and change coolant as per manufacturer's recommendations.
- **Brakes** - Worn brakes require more stopping distance and may pull left or right when stopping. Get a mechanic to check your brakes and make necessary repairs.
- **Oil** - Switch to winter grade oil for easier starting.
- **Battery** - Have your battery checked to make sure it will provide ample power for cold weather starts.
- **Tires** - Make sure your tires are properly inflated and have sufficient tread. "All season" tires are better than conventional tires; snow tires are even better. Tire chains may be necessary in some areas, which receive frequent, heavy snowfall. Chains are very effective on snow but are little or no help on solid ice.
- **Washer** - Reservoir should be kept full. Antifreeze should be added to prevent freezing.
- **Emergency supplies** - At a minimum, you should equip your vehicle with a flashlight, ice melt or kitty litter, cell phone and a scraper. You should also consider jumper cables, blanket, tools, a small shovel, flares or reflective markers.

### 2. Before You Begin

- **First consider:** Is the trip necessary or can it be done later after conditions have improved?
- **Before turning the key** - make sure the wipers are in good condition and are not stuck to the windshield. Streaky wipers should be replaced.
- **Headlights** should be cleaned for nighttime visibility and to ensure that other drivers can see you both day and night.
- **Windshields** - Remove snow and ice from the entire windshield, as well as side and rear windows. Don't forget that mirrors should be cleared of ice and readjusted after cleaning.
- **Warm up engine** and run heater/defroster while you are clearing snow or ice from windows/lights.
- **Fuel tank** should be filled to prevent running out and to reduce moisture in the fuel lines.

### 3. When You Begin

- **Put the clock in the trunk** - think only about getting there safely, not how long it will take.
- **If you must go**, double or triple your travel time.
- **Avoid quick acceleration**, fast turns, and hard braking.
- Remember that if you don't have **time to slow down**, you certainly don't have time for an accident!

- **Don't tailgate.** Of course, this is our advice for all driving conditions. However, in winter weather you must pay close attention to your following distance.
- Maintain a minimum following distance of 6-10 seconds. Under extremely bad conditions, even more than 10-seconds may be required.

#### 4. Special Considerations

- **Visibility** is a key factor during a winter storm. Turn your headlights on low beam so other drivers can see you. Never use parking lights – this can distort other driver's perception of your speed and distance.
- **Ice may re-form** on lights and windows so if a trip takes more than 40-min. you may need to pull off the road and scrape-off the new ice accumulation.
- **Freezing air** above and below a bridge/overpass cause ice to form more rapidly than on roads. The warmer ground below the road surface slows down the freezing process. Be aware that ice often forms on bridges well before snow/ice is visible on the road surfaces.
- **Black ice** is virtually invisible and usually a total surprise. This phenomenon is caused by re-freezing, is most common in shaded areas, bridges, and overpasses. Black ice is big, bad, and ugly - watch out!
- **Parking** - If your car will be parked for a long period during a snow event, it is better to back into a parking spot. When it's time to move, pulling out will be easier than backing out, for both front and rear drive vehicles.
- **If you are stuck**, avoid spinning your tires in one spot. In a parking space, try "rocking" the car backward and forward. If you are stuck at a stoplight, the rocking technique may not be advisable - this is where a shovel, burlap bag, kitty litter, etc. may be needed.
- **Going uphill** avoid staying close behind another vehicle. If the vehicle ahead starts spinning its tires, you will have to slow down and may lose traction.
- **Decelerate** well in advance of a turn, stopping point or when descending a hill. With ABS a continuous braking pressure is the general rule, however, going down a hill, on/off braking will help you maintain a safe speed.
- **When you start to skid**, turn the wheel in the direction of the skid. In other words, if your rear end starts sliding to the right, turn your wheel to the right.

#### Remember:

- Winter driving is more challenging – all of the normal hazards are greatly exaggerated. Road condition, visibility, vehicle condition, and driver condition are even more important.
- Cold weather vehicle maintenance requires special or additional considerations. For example, winter weight motor oil and new spark plugs will reduce wear on the starter and battery. Don't forget to make sure your brakes and tires are in good shape.
- Any vehicle breakdown or failure can put you and your passengers in a life-threatening situation, so make sure that you are well prepared.
- Hazards can surprise you so it is extremely important to equip your vehicle with a cell phone or other communication device, flashlight, flares/markers, jumper cables, blanket, etc.
- Keep your car clean to avoid damage from chemicals, sand and salt. Just a plain water rinse should reduce the effects of these agents.
- Maintain a following distance of 6-10 seconds. Never hurry when driving on slick pavement.
- Black ice is invisible! You must learn to "see" it by knowing and anticipating where it will occur.
- Be extremely smooth and gentle with your acceleration and braking.