

## WINTER DRIVING SAFETY



Perhaps the deadliest danger of all is "black ice." Black ice is ice which forms on a roadway, usually due to snow melting and re-freezing. Since it is almost invisible, drivers fail to recognize black ice conditions and may drive at normal speeds, often resulting in very serious accidents. Always be alert to the possibility of black ice when temperatures are near or below freezing.

Pavement that looks dry but appears darker in color and dull looking should alert you to the presence of black ice.

- Before you start out, make sure all ice and snow is removed from all the car windows. Be sure to clear off any snow accumulated on the hood and front fenders. This can make it hard to judge distance.
- Make sure your battery is up to snuff. Two things to remember about batteries: first, the battery that started your car easily in the summer may not have enough oomph to do it in winter, when oil isn't as fluid as it was last July. And secondly, batteries lose power as the temperature drops. So, not only do you need more power to start the car in winter, you also get less power from the same battery.
- Make sure the antifreeze for your cooling system will protect your car to the winter temperatures you'll experience in your area. For most areas, you will need a 50 - 50 mix of coolant to water. If your coolant hasn't been changed in several years, get the cooling system flushed, and add new coolant.
- Make sure your windshield wipers are in good shape. Consider changing to winter blades, which are made for driving in the snow.
- See that your windshield washer reservoir is full. On a snowy or messy day, you can easily go through half a gallon of fluid trying to keep your windshield clear. It's a good idea to keep an extra gallon in the trunk in case you run out.
- Make sure your rear window defroster works.
- Tires should be in good condition. Traction is reduced with old, worn tires. Consider installing snow tires during the winter season.
- Keep your gas tank as close to full as possible, for a couple of reasons. In winter, if you do get stuck or stranded, the engine will be your only source of heat. (make sure you keep a window open a crack if you're sitting there with the engine running) The other reason is that warm daytime temperatures will fill the empty space in the tank with moisture, which will condensate during the cold night. This water will sink to the bottom and sooner or later, rust out your tank, and effect gasoline performance.
- Know your car. Every car has different handling characteristics. You should know what your car can and cannot do in the snow. You should know if it has antilock brakes and traction control, how they work, and how they help. In fact, you should practice using these features in an empty parking lot before you use them on the roads.

### Have some basic supplies in your car in case you do get stuck.

- Small shovel to help dig out and a bag of sand to help with traction.
- Blanket, extra clothes, boots, gloves
- Flashlight with batteries; matches and candles. Candles will provide enough warmth to keep you from freezing.



- Booster cables
- Brightly colored cloth to use as a flag
- Books, cards, games to keep you occupied until help arrives.

### **If you are trapped in your car during a blizzard or major storm:**

- Stay in the car. Do not leave the car to search for assistance unless help is visible within 100 yards. You may become disoriented and lost in blowing and drifting snow. Other vehicles may also strike you.
- Beware of carbon monoxide poisoning. Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow, and open a downwind window slightly for ventilation.
- Do minor exercises to keep up circulation. Clap hands and move arms and legs occasionally. Try not to stay in one position for too long.
- Display a trouble sign if you have one.
- Don't accept rides from strangers. Ask them to call for help for you.
- Avoid overexertion.

### **Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.**

Frostbite is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, or nose and ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite. Hypothermia is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion.

If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, begin warming the person slowly and seek immediate medical assistance. Warm the person's trunk first. Arms and legs should be warmed last because stimulation of the limbs can drive cold blood toward the heart and lead to heart failure. Put the person in dry clothing and wrap their entire body in a blanket.

Never give a frostbite or hypothermia victim something with caffeine in it (like coffee or tea) or alcohol. Caffeine, a stimulant, can cause the heart to beat faster and hasten the effects the cold has on the body. Alcohol, a depressant, can slow the heart and also hasten ill effects on cold body temperatures.

**Winter storm watches and warnings** - A winter storm watch indicates that severe winter weather may affect your area. A winter storm warning indicates that severe winter weather conditions are definitely on the way.

Most of us have to drive in winter weather. Remember to increase your following distance, slow down, be patient, stay alert, and keep your car in good condition. Allow additional time to reach your destination. Following the above advice will make winter driving safer, less hectic, and reduce anxiety.