



The Cold Realities of Winter Driving

Experts are predicting that the worst of this winter season—in terms of precipitation and cold—will be from the Pacific Northwest into the northern Plains and western Great Lakes. And, as a result of this year's active hurricane season, late November and December could get winter off to a fast start in the East. It seems the only thing heating up will be the dangerous driving conditions.

Be Prepared

Before you leave on any trip this winter, be sure to perform a thorough pre-trip inspection. The problems of traveling in winter weather will only be compounded if your vehicle fails to operate properly. Check your tires for the proper pressure and the tread for maximum road traction. Pay special attention to your brakes, the condition of belts and hoses and make sure all fluid levels are adequate. Test the condition of windshield wipers and pay special attention to the defroster as it is an absolute necessity for visibility. Check your headlights and reflectors, and clean them frequently. On a personal level, drive only when you are physically rested and mentally alert to do so. Familiarize yourself with projected weather conditions along your trip's route from broadcast reports or the internet. If a traffic jam, accident or other delay does arise, an alternate route may be in order.

Reduce Speed

When road surfaces are wet, icy, snowy or slushy, traction is reduced. As traction decreases, driving speeds must also decrease. In very severe conditions, it can be reasonable to reduce your speed by 75% of the speed limit. Slowing down can help restore control of your vehicle.

'Tis the Season

The late fall and early winter season is one of the busiest travel times of the year. The Bureau of Transportation Statistics estimates that during the six-day Thanksgiving travel period, the number of long-distance trips (to and from a destination 50 miles or more away) increases by 54%, and during the Christmas/New Year's Holiday period the number rises by 23%. More people are out and about shopping, making holiday preparations or traveling to and from holiday parties, concerts, volunteer work and family gatherings. Delivery vehicles also crowd the roads much more than usual. When traveling, be aware of distracted drivers. Out-of-town visitors may be unfamiliar with the area, so keep a safe distance from vehicles making sudden or irregular movements as the driver may be focused on finding a street or an exit. Also, crowded sidewalks bring pedestrians into the street...and into harm's way. Practice patience and good judgment when pedestrians are present.

In short, slow down and stay vigilant.

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