

Winter Driving Tips

Winter can present some extremely dangerous driving conditions warns the National Safety Council (NSC). Snow, sleet, ice and extremely cold weather can lead to slower traffic, hazardous road conditions and other unforeseen dangers. The NSC offers these suggestions to ensure that motorists and their vehicles are prepared to handle the frigid winter months ahead.

- Always listen to radio or TV weather forecasts for current weather, road and traffic conditions.
- Prepare your car for winter. Make sure the windshield wipers, washers and defroster all work. Ask a mechanic to check the ignition, brakes, wiring, hoses, fan belts, battery and PVC valve. Change and adjust spark plugs and check the air, fuel and emission filters. Also, check the tires for air, sidewall wear and tread depth. In general, your car should have a tune-up every 12,000 to 15,000 miles to ensure better gas mileage, quicker starts and faster response on pick-up and passing power.
- Always keep a properly inflated spare tire, wheel wrench and tripod-type jack, a shovel, jumper cables, tow and tire chains, a bag of salt or cat litter, and a tool kit in your trunk.
- If you plan to drive long distances under cold, snowy, and icy conditions, you should carry heavy woolen mittens, socks, a cap and blanket. Newspapers can be wrapped around your torso and feet to keep you warm. Large plastic leaf bags with holes for your head and arms can keep you dry.
- If you become stranded, don't leave your car unless you know exactly where you are, how far it is to get help, and are certain you will improve your situation. (See below for additional tips on staying with your car.)
- If your car gets stuck in a snow bank, on ice or in a mud hole caused by snow melt, don't spin your wheels as you will only dig in deeper.
- On ice and snow, use easy, gradual foot pressure to accelerate. Gently rock the car forward and backward while keeping the front wheels pointed straight ahead.
- In snow and mud it is best to use a shovel to clear a path, but you can also turn the steering wheel from side to side to clear a space ahead of the front wheels. Then shift into second gear and gently ease out without spinning the wheels.
- Carry a Winter Survival Kit that contains at a minimum
 - a working flashlight and extra batteries
 - flares, reflective triangles and brightly-colored cloth
 - a compass
 - a first aid kit
 - exterior windshield cleaner
 - an ice scraper and snow brush
 - wooden stick matches in a waterproof container
 - scissors and string/cord
 - non-perishable, high energy foods like unsalted canned nuts dried fruits, and hard candy

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- If you get stuck in a winter storm, stay with the vehicle. Do not try to walk to safety. Follow these tips:
 - To attract attention, light two flares and place one at each end of the car a safe distance away.
 - Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna to aid plow operators or rescuers in seeing your vehicle
 - If you are sure the car's exhaust pipe is not blocked, start the car and use the heater for 10 minutes each hour
 - Keep the exhaust pipe clear and keep at least one window open (on side away from blowing wind) slightly open to let in fresh air. (Heavy snow and ice can seal a car shut.)
 - Leave the overhead light on only when the engine is running
 - Keep moving your arms and legs to stay warm. Eat a hard candy to keep your mouth moist.
 - To protect yourself from frostbite and hypothermia, use the woolen items, blanket, newspapers, and large bags to keep warm.

In addition to the above:

- Consider taking an accredited driving course. Some of these might even lower your insurance rates.
- While driving in conditions with minimized traction, do not use cruise control or overdrive as they may cause the wheels to spin or break loose or cause inadvertent acceleration or deceleration. Ensure cruise control isn't accidentally engaged while driving by turning this function to 'off'.
- Use of a four-wheel drive vehicle can improve traction in winter conditions, but does not improve braking (stopping). In addition, over confidence on the part of the driver can lead to attempting passage in areas where high centering becomes a potential. If driving such a vehicle, be sure to disengage the four wheel function when on dry pavement.