

Bad Weather Driving

Every winter, icy, snowy, cold weather is a factor in thousands of preventable automotive accidents. Adjusting your driving style, being aware and prepared and driving defensively are important contributors in keeping safe. Leaving enough space between you and the cars around you gives you enough time to slow, stop, get out of the way, avoid hazards on the road and remain calm and in control of your vehicle. Driving in bad weather is half the story, being aware and prepared by following the tips below will help you navigate the next round of bad weather.

- Take care of seasonal maintenance before the harsh weather arrives, this can be as early as October depending on where you live or are traveling to.
- Invest in a full set of winter tires and keep them on your car for the duration of the season. Winter tires are not just for snow, they are designed to perform better and give you improved traction in cold temperatures, snow and icy conditions.
- Check tire air pressure frequently, as your tire pressure can be affected by low temperatures decreases in cold weather.
- Keep essential supplies in your vehicle – a first aid kit, flashlight, blanket, small shovel, booster cables, extra windshield fluid, a snow brush/ice scraper, an extra set of mittens or gloves, warm hat and boots. Depending on the type of extreme weather you get and local by-laws such as DOT restrictions think about investing in specialty items such as such as traction mats, snow chains/tire socks and recovery straps,
- Keep your gas tank at least half-full at all times throughout winter. There are many reasons this is an important tip, aside from the mechanical recommendations in your owner’s manual (these range from optimal performance to preventing condensation and fuel lines freezing) there are 3 very practical reasons;
 - If you are stranded for a long period of time in poor weather, having enough gas means being able to run the car intermittently to heat your vehicle.
 - In poor driving conditions it may be necessary to be on the road due to accidents, bad driving conditions, road closures and detours – having enough gas can make these situations less stressful.
 - Weight: more gas means a heavier car and in winter that can means better traction especially if you drive a smaller car. Remember – more weight also means increased stopping time – leave enough space between you and the car in front of you.
- Carry a fully-charged cell phone with charging cables and backup power supply and use it only when safe. Do not use your handheld devices while driving, especially in poor driving conditions, unless your device is hands-free. Focus on driving with your full attention at all times.

- Check the weather and driving conditions before you head out and beware of conditions such as heavy or blowing snow and black ice, which are dangerous conditions to drive in.
- If possible; plan your travel around bad weather or poor driving conditions.
- If you have to travel in bad weather there are a few things you can do to make sure your drive is safer and less stressful:
- Make sure you can see properly by turning on your front and rear lights (don't rely on automatic or DRL -Daytime Running Lights) and by clearing your car of all snow and ice, including your head & taillights, windows and car surfaces. Pay special attention to your wipers and ensure they are free of snow and ice and make contact with your windshield. Winter conditions are harsh on your wipers and running them on ice can cause damage and result in poor visibility as well as shorten the lifespan of the wipers.
- When traveling in bad conditions don't drive faster than it is safe to do so and don't exceed the speed limit. On icy and snow-covered roads it takes longer to come to a stop. Keep safe by driving slow, stay steady through turns and don't accelerate quickly, avoid sudden stops and maintain ample distance from the cars in front of you.
- Allow for extra travel time to help manage the stress of driving in bad weather, it gives you extra time so you're not rushed and allows you to route your trip around accidents and slow downs. Drive to the conditions of the road and weather. Most winter accidents are preventable if all drivers exercise caution and respect the speed limits, weather and road conditions. Having snow tires and all-wheel drive are not guarantees against accidents and skidding.
- If you are get stuck, are in an accident or can't continue driving put your 4-way flashers on, call for help and stay with your vehicle with your seatbelt fastened, stay warm – don't run the engine the whole time, instead every hour that passes run the engine for no more than 10 minutes if you are sure your exhaust is clear of snow. If it's safe to do so keep the front and rear windshield free of snow accumulation and place warning cones or lights around the car. Once you call for help your priorities are to ensure your safety and to keep warm.

Pro-Tip:

Prepare your vehicle in advance, review your supplies seasonally and replenish or replace expired items. Make sure to keep it stocked with emergency supplies that are appropriate for where you live and drive. Always let snowplows, salters and sanders through first. Never pass a snowplow, it is extremely dangerous to pass either between or around snowplows, stay well back for your own safety and to allow them to do their job and the road surface is always better behind the plow than in front of it. Being smart and cautious will help get you to your destination safely.

Remember, use common sense and your full attention when you are driving. No matter how prepared you are for an emergency, no matter how many safety tools or precautions you take, sometimes choosing not to drive in poor conditions is the smartest, safest choice.

All the tips and instructions in this resource are meant to keep you safe as possible when you find yourself in an unexpected situation but nothing is foolproof or perfect. Be prepared, stay informed and make smart choices.

