



Winter is here and driving conditions can change in an instant. It is important for drivers to know the safety rules for winter travel and road emergencies.

Prepare Your Car for Winter

Besides checking the weather, it's important to have a mechanic check the condition of the following vehicle systems before heading out on the road:

- Ignition
- Brakes
- Wiring
- Hoses and fan belts
- Spark plugs
- Air, fuel and emissions filters, and PCV valve
- Distributor
- Battery
- Tire wear and air pressure
- Antifreeze level and freeze line

Winter Driving Tips

- Avoid driving while fatigued. Getting the proper amount of rest before taking on winter weather tasks reduces driving risks.
- Never warm up a vehicle in an enclosed area, such as a garage.
- Make certain tires are properly inflated.
- Keep gas tank at least half full to avoid gas line freeze-up.
- If possible, avoid using parking brake in cold, rainy, or snowy weather.
- Do not use cruise control when driving on any slippery surface (wet, ice, sand).
- Use your seat belt every time you get into your vehicle.

Tips for Long-Distance Winter Trips

- Watch weather reports prior to a long-distance drive or before driving in isolated areas. Delay trips when especially bad weather is expected. If you must leave, let others know the route, destination, and estimated time of arrival.
- Always make sure the vehicle is in peak operating condition by having it inspected by an auto repair facility.
- Keep at least half a tank of gasoline in the vehicle at all times.
- Pack a cell phone, blankets, gloves, hats, food, water, and any needed medication.
- If you become snowbound, stay with your vehicle. It provides temporary shelter and makes it easier for rescuers to locate you. Don't try to walk in a severe storm. It's easy to lose sight of your vehicle in blowing snow and become lost.
- Don't over exert yourself if you try to push or dig your vehicle out of the snow.
- Tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna or place a cloth at the top of a rolled up window to signal distress. At night, keep

the dome light on if possible. It only uses a small amount of electricity and will make it easier for rescuers to find you.

- Make sure the exhaust pipe isn't clogged with snow, ice, or mud. A blocked exhaust could cause deadly carbon monoxide gas to leak into the passenger compartment with the engine running.
- Use whatever is available to insulate your body from the cold. This could include floor mats, newspapers, or paper maps.
- If possible, run the engine and heater just long enough to remove the chill and to conserve gasoline.

Tips for Driving in the Snow

- Accelerate and decelerate slowly. Applying the gas pedal slowly to accelerate is the best method for regaining traction and avoiding skids. Don't try to get moving in a hurry. Take time to slow down for a stoplight. Remember, it takes longer to slow down on icy roads.
- Drive slowly. Everything takes longer on snow-covered roads. Give yourself time to maneuver by driving slowly.
- The normal dry pavement following distance of three to four seconds should be increased to eight to ten seconds. This increased margin of safety will provide the longer distance needed if you have to stop.
- Don't stop if you can avoid it. There's a big difference in the amount of inertia it takes to start moving from a full stop versus how much it takes to get moving while still rolling. If you can slow down enough to keep rolling until a traffic light changes, do it.
- Don't power up hills. Applying extra gas on snow-covered roads just starts your wheels spinning. Try to get a little inertia going before you reach the hill and let that inertia carry you to the top. As you reach the crest of the hill, reduce your speed and proceed downhill as slowly as possible.
- Stay home. If you really don't have to go out, don't. Even if you can drive well in the snow, not everyone else can. If you don't have somewhere you have to be, watch the snow from indoors.

Winter road trips, even short ones, are a great way to celebrate with family and friends. Being prepared can ensure a safe and happy time is had by all.

References:
National Safety Council Be Prepared for Winter Driving
AAA Winter Driving Tips

