

January 21, 2005

Winter Driving Safety

The hazardous driving conditions of the winter months have arrived. To be ready for the added demands of winter's harsh weather, drivers should put their two basic driving rules into practice: Increase following distance and reduce speed. Vehicle control is increased if you "take it slow". Rain, snow, ice, fog and darkness can all contribute to accidents. Speed should be adjusted for conditions. Tire chains should be carried for winter emergencies.

Oil droppings coat the road with a film. Light showers will float this oil to the surface, causing a slippery surface. Freezing rain and sleet also can make driving extremely dangerous. Skidding is likely to occur at curves, intersections and hills.

Another speed-related problem in winter is overdriving the headlights----driving so fast you can't stop in the area lit up by your headlights. During bad weather, low beams should be used to counter the reflective nature of rain, ice and snow. This helps the driver's distance vision.

The distance needed to safely stop a vehicle increases on slippery roads. Maintain greater-than-usual distances between you and other vehicles on the road, and anticipate slowdowns. These are your best defenses. Don't tailgate!

Here are some other winter driving common-sense precautions:

- Be aware of black ice. It is invisible and deadly. If spray from other vehicles suddenly decreases, this is a sign that black ice may be forming.
- Carry extra warm clothing and blankets for use in an emergency.
- Keep all windows and mirrors clean and clear.
- Slow down for bridges and overpasses, where freezing occurs more quickly.
- Don't leave the home or office in unsafe weather conditions, especially in a snow or ice storm.
- If weather conditions are so bad that safety is compromised, drivers should stop until it is safe to proceed.

- If you are stranded on the highway in a winter storm, don't attempt to leave the vehicle. Your chances of surviving are much greater if you stay with the vehicle.
- Winter drivers should make sure that the vehicle exhaust system is in good operating condition.
- Tires should be rotated regularly to maximize tread life.
- Don't mix all-season radial tires having different speed ratings, or mix all-seasons with snow tires. The handling characteristics can be quite different, similar to a person trying to run with one high-tech running shoe and one bedroom slipper.
- If you live in a Snow Belt or must drive regularly through one invest in quality snow tires.

Safety Tip: Use all your winter driving wisdom and your two basic rules: reduce speed and increase following distance. If you comply with these two rules and use common-sense winter driving precautions you will reduce your chances of being involved in an accident.

