

RICHLAND COUNTY SAFE COMMUNITIES COALITION: Winter Driving

FACT SHEET:

Winter Driving

The leading cause of death during winter storms is motor vehicle accidents. Preparing your vehicle for the winter season and knowing how to react if stranded or lost on the road are the keys to safe winter driving.



Before winter sets in have a mechanic check the following items on your car:

- Battery
- Antifreeze
- Wipers and windshield washer fluid
- Ignition system
- Thermostat
- Lights
- Flashing hazard lights
- Exhaust system
- Heater
- Brakes
- Defroster
- Oil level (if necessary, replace existing oil with a winter grade oil or the SAE 10w/30 weight variety)

Install good winter tires.

Make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions. Chains or snow tires with studs will give extra traction on covered roads.

Additional Tips:

- Keep a windshield scraper and small broom for ice and snow removal.
- Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season.
- Plan long trips carefully.
- Listen to the radio or call the state highway patrol for the latest road conditions. Always travel during daylight and, if possible, take at least one other person.
- If you must go out during a winter storm, use public transportation.
- Dress warmly. Wear layers of loose-fitting, layered, lightweight clothing.
- Carry food and water. Store a supply of high energy "munchies" and several bottles of water.

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Winter Car Kit

Keep these items in your car:

- Flashlights with extra batteries
- First aid kit with pocket knife
- Necessary medications
- Several blankets
- Sleeping bags
- Extra newspapers for insulation
- Plastic bags (for sanitation)
- Matches
- Extra set of mittens, socks, and a wool cap
- Rain gear and extra clothes
- Small sack of sand for generating traction under wheels
- Small shovel
- Small tools (pliers, wrench, screwdriver)
- Booster cables
- Set of tire chains or traction mats
- Cards, games, and puzzles
- Brightly colored cloth to use as a flag
- Canned fruit and nuts
- Nonelectric can opener
- Bottled water

IF TRAPPED IN CAR DURING A BLIZZARD

- Stay in the car.
Do not leave the car to search for assistance unless help is visible within 100 yards.
You may become disoriented and lost in blowing and drifting snow.
- Display a trouble sign.
Hang a brightly colored cloth on the radio antenna and raise the hood.
- Occasionally run engine to keep warm.
Turn on the car's engine for about 10 minutes each hour. Run the heater when the car is running. Also, turn on the car's dome light when the car is running.
- Beware of carbon monoxide poisoning.
Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow, and open a downwind window slightly for ventilation.
- Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Do minor exercises to keep up circulation.
- Clap hands and move arms and legs occasionally.
Try not to stay in one position for too long. If more than one person is in the car, take turns sleeping.
- For warmth, huddle together.
- Use newspapers, maps, and even the removable car mats for added insulation.
- Avoid overexertion.
Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Be aware of symptoms of dehydration.

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IF YOU MUST DRIVE THROUGH SNOW OR ICE, REMEMBER THESE TIPS

The best advice for driving in bad winter weather is not to drive at all, if you can avoid it. Don't go out until the snow plows and sanding trucks have had a chance to do their work, and allow yourself extra time to reach your destination.

If you must drive in snowy conditions, make sure your car is prepared (see *Winterize Your Car* above), and that you know how to handle road conditions. It's helpful to practice winter driving techniques in a snowy, open parking lot, so you're familiar with how your car handles. Consult your owner's manual for tips specific to your vehicle.

Driving safely on icy roads

- Decrease your speed and leave yourself plenty of room to stop. You should allow at least three times more space than usual between you and the car in front of you.
- Brake gently to avoid skidding. If your wheels start to lock up, ease off the brake.
- Turn on your lights to increase your visibility to other motorists.
- Keep your lights and windshield clean.
- Use low gears to keep traction, especially on hills.
- Don't use cruise control or overdrive on icy roads.
- Be especially careful on bridges, overpasses and infrequently traveled roads, which will freeze first. Even at temperatures above freezing, if the conditions are wet, you might encounter ice in shady areas or on exposed roadways like bridges.
- Don't pass snow plows and sanding trucks. The drivers have limited visibility, and you're likely to find the road in front of them worse than the road behind.
- Don't assume your vehicle can handle all conditions. Even four-wheel and front-wheel drive vehicles can encounter trouble on winter roads.

If your rear wheels skid...

- Take your foot off the accelerator.
- Steer in the direction you want the front wheels to go. If your rear wheels are sliding left, steer left. If they're sliding right, steer right.
- If your rear wheels start sliding the other way as you recover, ease the steering wheel toward that side. You might have to steer left and right a few times to get your vehicle completely under control.
- If you have standard brakes, pump them gently.
- If you have anti-lock brakes (ABS), do not pump the brakes. Apply steady pressure to the brakes. You will feel the brakes pulse -- this is normal.

If your front wheels skid...

- Take your foot off the gas and shift to neutral, but don't try to steer immediately.
- As the wheels skid sideways, they will slow the vehicle and traction will return. As it does, steer in the direction you want to go. Then put the transmission in "drive" or release the clutch, and accelerate gently.

If you get stuck...

- Do not spin your wheels. This will only dig you in deeper.
- Turn your wheels from side to side a few times to push snow out of the way.
- Use a light touch on the gas, to ease your car out.
- Use a shovel to clear snow away from the wheels and the underside of the car.
- Pour sand, kitty litter, gravel or salt in the path of the wheels, to help get traction. Try rocking the vehicle. (Check your owner's manual first -- it can damage the transmission on some vehicles.) Shift from forward to reverse, and back again. Each time you're in gear, give a light touch on the gas until the vehicle gets going.