

January 2005 - Driving in Bad Weather

Introduction: Bad weather driving plays a major role in our highway fatality rate. In 2003, 43,220 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes on the nation's highways. Most of these accidents are generally related to irresponsible driving behavior.

Goal: To highlight various safe driving practices and techniques that can be used to reduce the likelihood of an accident in typical weather conditions such as rain, snow, ice sleet and fog.

Safe Practices and Techniques for Various Weather Conditions

Poor Visibility:

- Turn your headlights on anytime you need to turn your windshield wipers on. (It's now the law in many states.)
- Reduce your speed so you can stop in whatever distance you can see ahead.
- Use your low beams when visibility is a problem, both day and night.
- Increase the space you normally leave between you and the next vehicle in front of you.
- Keep your windows and windshield clear. Leave a window open a little bit to keep windshield from fogging up and to give you fresh air.
- Stay to the right of the roadway. If you can't see the road's edge, pull off on the right, well out of the traffic lane and turn on your emergency flashers.

Snow or Ice:

- At least double the space you normally leave between you and the vehicle in front of you. *Double the "2 second following rule" to 4 seconds.
- Slow down. This decreases the chance of skids and accidents.
- Use brakes cautiously if they are not antilock brakes. Abrupt braking can cause brake lock-up, which causes you to lose steering control.
- Antilock brakes are designed to overcome a loss of steering control. To make antilock brakes work correctly, you should apply constant firm pressure to the pedal.
- Bridges and overpasses freeze first. Slow down and avoid sudden changes in speed or direction.
- Keep windows and windshield clear of ice and snow. Make sure wipers are working properly and that your wiper fluid reservoir is full.
- If you skid, take your foot off the gas and turn in the direction you want the vehicle to go. Avoid using the brake.
- Don't engage your vehicle's cruise control on slippery or wet roads.

Wet Conditions:

- Slow down below posted speed limits. The road becomes slippery as water mixes with road oils, grease and dirt. Your vehicle's tires tend to ride on the surface water, reducing traction.
- To avoid hydroplaning, try to drive in the tracks of the vehicle in front of you.
- Avoid braking heavily.
- If spray from other vehicles blinds you, grip the wheel firmly, stay off the brake and be ready to brake when the view clears.
- Avoid using your cruise control.

Other Severe Weather Conditions:

- **High Winds** - Use extra care and consider if a trailer, van or other "high-profile" vehicle should be operated at all.
- **Hailstorms** - Find shelter by driving under an overpass or bridge.

- **Severe thunderstorms** - Listen to you radio and be alert. If you spot a tornado, don't try to outrun it. Get out of your vehicle, find shelter in a ditch or low-lying area and lie face down to protect yourself from flying debris.
- **Hurricanes** - Avoid low areas and move inland while there's still plenty of time.

General Conditions:

- Always buckle up. Be sure you and your passengers wear seatbelts at all times. It's the law in most states; it can save lives, especially when driving in bad weather.
- Do not use your cell phone when driving. If it becomes necessary to use your cell phone, the vehicle should be appropriately parked and the engine shut off.
- Make sure your car is well maintained: wipers in good condition, fluid levels full, tires properly inflated and worn tires replaced.
- Don't drive when you are tired. Pull over at a safe spot off the road and rest.

*The rule of thumb when using the 2 second following rule is to allow a 2 second bubble of space between the front of your car and the rear of the vehicle in front of you. Watch as the vehicle in front passes a fixed object; start counting "one-one thousand, two-one thousand." Your car should not pass the fixed object before you are done counting. On wet or snowy roads increase this space to 4 seconds. Icy conditions may require more spacing.