



Safety Scene

Slippery Slopes: Keep Winter Road Conditions in Check

by Molly E. Butz

Winter is right around the corner, and so are all the driving hazards that come with it!

Now that Thanksgiving is quickly approaching and the retail stores have been displaying their holiday collateral for well over two months, it's time to talk about something not nearly as fun but equally as serious: winter driving. From delivery drivers to sales staff, there are likely numerous employees at many component manufacturing facilities that will find themselves on the road navigating their way through sleet, snow or ice.

Even the most skilled drivers can be tested by slippery road surfaces, and that makes winter driving dangerous and scary. However, preparing mentally and physically for these conditions can make cold-weather precipitation a little less menacing. Stay safe this winter with these helpful tips, and be sure to share them with anyone at your company that will be on the road for work or play!

OSHA suggests the Three P's of safe winter driving:

- Prepare
- Protect
- Prevent

Begin preparing for winter-weather driving by making sure the vehicle you'll be driving is in good operating condition. You'll feel immediately more confident knowing you can get from point A to point B without car/truck troubles. The American Automobile Association (AAA) recommends checking the following items:

- Battery
- Antifreeze level
- Wipers and windshield washer fluid
- Ignition system
- Thermostat
- Headlights and hazard lights
- Exhaust system
- Defroster and heater
- Brakes
- Oil level
- Tires

Once your vehicle is prepared, plan out your route! It's even more necessary when the weather and road conditions are challenging to know where you're going. Make sure you let someone know when you expect to arrive. (This way they'll know when to start worrying that you're late!)

Luckily, winter doesn't last forever. However, that also means there aren't many opportunities to "practice" your winter driving skills. When you have the opportunity, utilize empty parking lots to practice emergency maneuvers, preferable during daylight hours for safety's sake. Understanding how your vehicle will react can greatly improve your ability to manage out on the road. For instance, it's easy to forget how much longer it takes to stop on snowy and icy roads.

You can also get ready for a potentially hazardous winter trip by putting together a basic cold-weather emergency kit. Keep these inexpensive and easy to find items in your vehicle—just in case!

- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Jumper cables
- Snow brush/ice scraper
- First aid kit
- Pocket knife
- Blanket
- Mittens, extra socks and a winter cap/hat
- Waterproof covering (try a small tarp or a poncho)
- A small sack of sand or cat litter for traction
- A small shovel
- Lighter/waterproof matches
- Basic tool kit (pliers, screwdrivers, adjustable wrench, tape and wire)
- Paper towels
- Good map/directions or atlas of the areas where you travel
- Emergency flares or a mirror (Don't forget, a music CD can double as a mirror!)

For longer trips consider adding bottled water, a bag of trail mix or energy/protein bars and extra dose(s) of any medications that would be necessary if you got stranded.

The second "P," Protect, is pretty straight forward: always wear your seat belt! And, although it's not federally mandated, New Hampshire is the only state that does not have a seat belt requirement for persons over 18 years old. So it's not just a good idea, it's the law.

The third, and final "P," is Prevent, i.e., Prevent Crashes. With these few things in mind, you'll make the road a safer place for you and everyone around you.

- Never use drugs or alcohol before driving; even some over-the-counter medicines can be dangerous to take before getting behind the wheel.
- Make sure you're well rested before you hit the road, fatigue can greatly slow your reaction time.
- Go slowly! Taking a few extra minutes to get where you're going might just make the difference between getting there...or not.

Last but not least, be reasonable. If you don't have to go, stay put. Most travel can wait a few hours, or even a day if the weather is really bad. In the end, you'll almost definitely be glad you waited. Safety first! **SBC**

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email wtca@sbcindustry.com, or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at www.wtcalco.com.

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