



SAFER WINTER TRAVEL: These Tips Can Help

Winter driving can be dangerous. Being unprepared increases the risks. No one wants to break down in any season, but especially not in cold or snowy winter weather. Ensure that your vehicle is in optimal working condition and that you thoroughly plan your trip.

Battery

Temperature changes can dramatically alter battery life and dependability. As the temperature drops, so does battery power.

- Have your mechanic check your battery for sufficient voltage and have it replaced, if necessary.
- Have the charging system and belts inspected and serviced, including simple things like tightening the battery cable connections.
- Minimize the drain on the batteries for electric vehicles. Follow manufacturer recommendations regarding cold weather operation.

Cooling System Concerns

Coolant expands as it freezes, which can potentially damage the vehicle's engine block.

- Make sure you have enough coolant in your vehicle and that it is designed to withstand the winter temperatures you might experience in your area. See your vehicle owner's manual for specific recommendations on coolant.
- Have a mechanic check the cooling system for leaks.
- Have your coolant system flushed (draining the system and replacing the coolant) if it has not been done in several years. Over time, the rust inhibitors in antifreeze break down and become ineffective. Coolant also needs to be refreshed periodically to remove dirt and rust particles that can clog the cooling system and cause it to fail.

Tires

Regardless of the season, inspect your tires at least once a month and always before setting out on a long road trip.

- Keep a tire gauge in your vehicle and check tire pressure when tires are cold (i.e., they have not been driven on for at least three hours). Tire pressure drops a pound as the temperature drops 10 degrees. Properly inflated tires ensure optimum tire performance and optimum vehicle driving range.
- Make sure each tire is filled to the vehicle manufacturer's recommended inflation pressure.
- Check your tire tread depth and wear patterns. The depth should be at least 1/16 of an inch (1.6 mm) on all tires.
- Replace tires that have uneven wear or insufficient tread. Ensure you are using tires appropriate for the winter driving conditions you may encounter.

Visibility

Safe winter driving depends on achieving and maintaining the best visibility possible.

- Make sure your windshield wipers and defrosters are working properly. Replace worn windshield wipers and consider installing heavy-duty winter wipers if you live in an area that gets a lot of snow and ice.
- Refill the windshield washer reservoir as needed with high-quality, "no-freeze" washer fluid. You can go through a lot of windshield wiper fluid quickly in a single snowstorm, so carry additional windshield wiper fluid in the vehicle.

Vehicle Operation

Every vehicle handles differently. This is particularly true when driving on wet, icy, or snowy roads. Take time to learn how to best handle your vehicle under winter weather driving conditions.

- Practice cold weather driving when your area gets snow – but not on a main road.
- Drive slowly and increase your following distance enough so you will have plenty of time to stop for vehicles ahead of you.

- Learn the correct braking technique for your vehicle. If you have antilock brakes, apply firm, continuous pressure. If you do not have antilock brakes, pump the brakes gently.
- Should the vehicle lose traction and start to skid, stay calm, and ease your foot off the gas while carefully steering in the direction you want the front of your vehicle to go. Stay off the gas and brake pedals until you can maintain control of your vehicle. This procedure, known as “steering into the skid,” will bring the back end of your car in line with the front.
- When renting a car, become familiar with the vehicle before driving it off the lot. For instance, know the location and operation of all controls (e.g., lights, hazard flashers, windshield wipers, etc.).

Travel Plans

Keep yourself and others safe by planning before you venture out into bad weather.

- Check the weather, road conditions, and traffic; plan to leave early if necessary. Allow plenty of time to get to your destination safely.
- Familiarize yourself with directions and maps, program global positioning systems (GPS) before you leave, and let others know your route and anticipated arrival time.
- If road conditions are hazardous, avoid driving if possible or wait until road and weather conditions improve before starting your trip.
- Keep your gas tank close to full, and your batteries fully charged with an electric vehicle.

Stock Your Vehicle

Carry items in your vehicle to handle common winter driving tasks, such as cleaning off your windshield, as well as any supplies you might need in an emergency.

- A snow shovel, broom, and ice scraper.
- Abrasive material, such as sand or kitty litter, in case your vehicle gets stuck on ice or in snow.
- Jumper cables, flashlight, and warning devices, such as reflective triangles.
- Blankets or sleeping bags to protect you and your passengers from the cold.
- A cell phone with charger, water, food, and any necessary medicine (especially for longer trips or when driving in lightly populated areas).

Winter Emergency

If you are stopped or stalled in wintry weather, follow these safety rules:

- Stay with your car. Use extreme caution when venturing out of your vehicle.
- Should you get stuck on the road, try to move your vehicle to a safe location.
- Put bright markers on the antenna or windows and keep the interior dome light turned on.
- Avoid carbon monoxide poisoning by keeping your vehicle's exhaust pipe clear of snow and ice, running your vehicle with the windows partially down, and running the vehicle only long enough to keep warm.

For more information:

- [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration >>](#)
- [American Automobile Association >>](#)
- [National Safety Council >>](#)
- [Occupational Safety and Health Administration >>](#)

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Utica Mutual Insurance Company and its affiliated companies, New Hartford, NY 13413
www.uticanational.com • 1.800.598.8422