

Winter Driving

Whether it's snow, sleet or ice, winter weather can cause extremely dangerous road conditions. In 2022 there were 498 fatal traffic crashes, and an estimated 32,213 injury crashes that occurred when there was snow/sleet conditions at the time of the crash. Preparing yourself – and your vehicle – for winter weather is key.

The Basics

Slow down. It's harder to control or stop your vehicle on a slick or snow-covered surface. In fact, 2022 there were an estimated 153,620 police reported traffic crashes that occurred when there was snow/sleet conditions at the time of the crash. On the road, increase your following distance enough so that you'll have plenty of time to stop for vehicles ahead of you.

Don't crowd a snow plow or travel beside the truck. Snow plows travel slowly, make wide turns, stop often, overlap lanes, and exit the road frequently. If you find yourself behind a snow plow, stay far enough behind it and use caution if you pass the plow.

What to Do in an Emergency

If you are stopped or stalled in wintry weather, stay focused on yourself and your passengers, your car, and your surroundings.

Stay with your car and don't overexert yourself.

Let your car be seen. Put bright markers on the antenna or windows and keep the interior dome light on.

Be mindful of carbon monoxide poisoning. Make sure your exhaust pipe is clear of any snow and run your car only sporadically – just long enough to stay warm. Don't run your car for long periods of time with the windows up or in an enclosed space.

Tires

As the outside temperature drops, so does tire inflation pressure. Make sure each tire is filled to the vehicle manufacturer's recommended inflation pressure, which is in your owner's manual and on a label located on the driver's side door frame. Do not inflate your tires to the pressure listed on the tire itself. That number is the maximum pressure the tire can hold, not the recommended pressure for the your vehicle.

Some other tips:

Inspect your tires at least once a month and before long road trips. It's best to check the tires when they're cold, meaning that they have not been driven on for at least three hours.

Check each tire's age. Some vehicle manufacturers recommend replacing tires every six years regardless of use.

An inspection is not just about checking tire pressure and age.

Remember to check for any damage or conditions that may need attention; the tread and sidewalls for any cuts, punctures, bulges, scrapes, cracks, or bumps. The tread should be at least 2/32 of an inch or greater on all tires; and your spare tire.

Preparing Your Vehicle

Lights

Check your headlights, brake lights, turn signals, emergency flashers and interior lights. Be sure to also check your trailer brake lights and turn signals, if necessary.

Windshield Wipers

You can quickly go through a lot of windshield wiper fluid in a single snowstorm. Make sure your vehicle's reservoir is full of high-quality "winter" fluid with de-icer before winter weather hits. Make sure defrosters and all windshield wipers work and replace any worn blades. Consider installing heavy-duty winter wipers if you live in an area that gets a lot of snow and ice.

Cooling System

Make sure you have enough coolant in your vehicle, and that it meets the manufacturer's specifications. See your vehicle owner's manual for recommendations. Check the cooling system for leaks, test the coolant, and drain or replace the old coolant.

You may also want to visit your mechanic for a tune-up and ask them to check for leaks, badly worn hoses, or other needed parts, repairs, and replacements.

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