

Safe Winter Driving

The leading cause of death during winter storms is transportation 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 a Storm

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 SAE5w/30 weight variety)

Install good winter tires. Make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions. However, some jurisdictions require that to drive on their roads, vehicles

must be equipped with chains or snow tires with studs.

Keep a windshield scraper and small broom for handy ice and snow removal.

Keep 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.

Use alternate transportation. If you must go out during a winter storm, use public transportation whenever possible.

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. (Allow for expansion in container if water might freeze.)

Contact your local emergency management office, American Automobile Association (AAA) or American Red Cross chapter for more information on winter driving.

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 or lighter
- 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 (Allow for freezing)
- Nonelectric can opener
- Bottled water (Allow for freezing)

If You Are Trapped in Your Car During a Storm

- **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 if weather permits.
- **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.**

Frostbite is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, or nose and ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite.

Hypothermia is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion.

If you think someone has frostbite or hypothermia, begin warming the person slowly and seek medical help. Warm the person's trunk first. Use your own body heat to help. Arms and legs should be warmed last because stimulation of the limbs can drive cold blood toward the heart and lead to heart failure. Put person in dry clothing and wrap their entire body in a blanket.

Never give a frostbite or hypothermia victim something with caffeine in it (like coffee or tea) or alcohol. Caffeine, a stimulant, can cause the heart to beat faster and hasten the effects the cold has on the body. Alcohol, a depressant, can slow the heart and also hasten the ill effects of cold body temperatures.

- 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 and 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 a car can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse. Be aware of symptoms of dehydration.

Source: *Winter Driving*, Federal Emergency Management Agency. Reviewed by Jack W. Donovan, Extension educator.

For more information on emergency preparedness, contact your county Extension office.

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