

## Winter Driving

Even for the most experienced, winter driving can be a challenge. The unpredictability of the UK's weather makes sure of that.

Snow, ice, rain, fog, and gale-force winds all add to the hazards of driving on our already crowded roads. And you can add dark evenings and early mornings into the mix too.

That's why accidents on our roads always increase during the winter months.

So it makes sense to wise up on winter driving. Of course, most of it is common sense, but taking that bit of extra care when you're behind the wheel reduces the risk of injury or worse for both yourself, and other road users.

### Be Prepared

Winter conditions take an extra toll on your vehicle's wear and tear. So adding a few additional checks to your normal pre-journey walk round will make your vehicle safer and might prevent a breakdown, avoiding unexpected delays, even in the worst of weather conditions. So as well as checking the seating position, tyres, electrics, driving controls (steering, footbrakes, airbrakes and parking brake) and mirrors, also look out for corrosion around battery terminals and suzie couplings, both of which take a hammering during the winter months. It's also a good idea to check for any ice build-up on the tail lift, if there's one on your vehicle.

Remember, the walk round check is designed to answer these questions:

- Does everything work?
- Is everything secure?
- Will you have proper control over your vehicle?
- Is anything damaged or missing?
- Does the vehicle create a nuisance?
- Could anything on the vehicle harm anyone?
- It's a good idea to pack an emergency kit for winter driving. Essential items to include are warm clothes and a blanket, food and a flask with a hot drink. Make sure you also have a torch and a shovel.

### Weather Watch

It's a good idea to keep a regular check on local and national weather forecasts. If really bad weather is expected you may need to take a view on the importance of the journey. Out on the road, keep an eye open for signs displaying information about adverse weather conditions and, as a result, reduced speed limits.

**Fog** – Use dipped headlights. If visibility is less than 100 metres, use front fog lights and rear intensity lights. And remember, fog can be patchy, so try not to speed up if conditions improve – you could run back into it a few miles further down the road.

**Rain** – If your vehicle starts to aquaplane, don't go for the brakes, take your foot off the accelerator and slow down gradually.

**Snow and ice** – It can be hard to tell if a road is icy. If your tyres are making virtually no noise on the road you could well be driving on ice. If you are on sheet ice, don't brake as this will make you skid further. If you find yourself behind a gritter or snow plough, only overtake if it is safe to do so. And remember there may well be uncleared snow on the road ahead.

**Gale force winds** – You'll need no reminding that high-sided vehicles are particularly affected by windy weather. But don't forget that vulnerable road-users such as cyclists, motorcyclists and horse riders can be particularly affected by strong cross-winds on exposed roads.

### On the Road

When you're on the road, always be aware of what the weather's doing. It can change quickly and dramatically. And if it does turn rough you'll need to change the way you drive – even on roads you know well.

Reduce your speed – Poor visibility, wet or icy roads mean that it will take you longer to react to danger. So take your foot off the gas.

Open up a gap – The distance between your vehicle and the one in front is your safety buffer. Remember it takes twice as long to stop on a wet road and ten times longer on an icy one. So in wintry conditions leave a longer gap than usual between you and the vehicle in front.

## Staffing Match

Smoothly does it – Don't brake harshly or accelerate quickly. Carry out all manoeuvres slowly and with extra care.

Light up – It's ok, we're not advocating smoking in the cab! But on winter days, even when weather conditions don't seem that bad, visibility can be an issue, so it makes sense to get your lights on

## Emergency Measures

If the weather really closes in on you and you grind to a halt in thick snow, don't spin your wheels in an effort to get out.

Putting some old carpet under the drive wheels will give them something to grip on and should help to get you moving again. If this fails and you find yourself stuck with your vehicle, keep warm by running the engine and heater every ten minutes. It's also a good idea to keep the circulation going by moving around. Remember to call your manager or supervisor to let them know what's happened.

## Useful sources of information

For up to the minute information on road conditions on major routes:

England Highways Agency website and information line: 0300 123 5000

Scotland Traffic Scotland website

Wales Traffic Wales website

Northern Ireland Traffic Watch website

### Weather

The Met Office provides information on weather conditions throughout the UK. In addition, local radio stations give regular bulletins and information on road conditions in their area. For further and more detailed information on driving in bad weather visit the Highways Agency.