

Driving Safely in Winter Weather

Overview

The British winter is unpredictable and bad weather can strike suddenly. When planning to drive in wintry conditions make sure you are fully prepared. This toolbox talk offers you advice to help you stay safe on the roads and information to guide you if you do get into trouble.

Plan your journey during wintry weather conditions

- Check the local and national weather forecasts and listen to local and national radio for travel information
- Tell someone at your destination what time you expect to arrive
- Make sure you are equipped with warm clothes, food, boots and a torch; in snowy conditions, take a spade
- Always carry your Barhale vehicle safety pack & highway code in your vehicle
- Clear and de-mist your windows and mirrors before you set out and carry a windscreen scraper and de-icer

Keep your vehicle in good condition

In winter, it is even more important to check that your vehicle is well maintained and serviced.

- Keep the lights, windows and mirrors clean and free from ice and snow
- Make sure your battery is fully charged
- Add anti-freeze to the radiator and a winter additive to the windscreen washer bottles
- Make sure wipers and lights are in good working order
- Check that tyres have plenty of tread depth and are maintained at the correct pressure

If you do get into trouble

- Do not use a mobile phone while driving. Instead, stop somewhere safe or ask a passenger to make the call
- On a motorway, it is best to use a roadside emergency telephone, because it will help the breakdown/emergency services to locate you easily. If you have to use a mobile phone, make sure you know your location from the numbers on the marker posts positioned at the side of the hard shoulder
- Abandoned vehicles can hold up rescue vehicles and snow ploughs, so to ensure that the road is cleared as quickly as possible, stay with your vehicle until help arrives
- If you have to leave your vehicle to get help, make sure other drivers can see you clearly

Adjust your driving to the conditions

Driving in low visibility on icy or wet roads requires a very different driving style. There are some simple steps you should take to ensure your safety when exposed to the different driving hazards.

In low visibility

- When driving in hail, heavy snow or rain, use your dipped headlights and reduce your speed

When roads are icy or slushy

- It can take ten times longer to stop, so drive slowly, allowing extra room to slow down and stop
- When accelerating, use the highest gear possible to prevent your wheels from spinning, manoeuvre gently, avoiding harsh braking and acceleration
- To brake without locking your wheels, use a low gear earlier than normal so your engine will smoothly reduce your speed and use your brake pedal gently
- If you do start to skid, ease off the accelerator but do not brake suddenly

In winter sun

- Glare from the low winter sun can be dangerous, so use your visor and keep a pair of sunglasses in your vehicle

In foggy conditions

- Expect visibility to deteriorate rapidly as fog drifts quickly and is often patchy
- Drive very slowly and use your dipped headlights
- Use fog lights if visibility is seriously reduced, but remember to switch them off when visibility improves
- Don't hang on to the tail lights of the vehicle in front, as you may well be driving too close
- Don't speed up suddenly, even if it seems to be clearing, as you can suddenly find yourself back in thick fog

In wet weather

- Stopping distances will be at least doubled as your tyres have less grip on the wet road, so leave more distance between you and the vehicle in front to increase your ability to see, plan ahead and brake
- If your steering becomes unresponsive, the water may be preventing your tyres from gripping the road, so ease off your accelerator and slow down gradually
- The rain and spray from vehicles may make it difficult to see and be seen, so increase the distance between you and the vehicle in front and use your dipped headlights

When coming across flooded roads

- If the water seems too deep, find another route instead of risking breakdown by attempting to cross it
- If the water does seem shallow enough to cross, drive slowly in first gear and avoid the deepest water, which is usually near the kerb. To avoid stalling your engine while in first gear, keep your revs high by slipping the clutch
- Remember to test your brakes when you are through the flood before you drive at normal speed

Take care around winter road maintenance vehicles

The Highways Agency, an executive agency of the Department for Transport, is responsible for the motorways and trunk roads in England. It aims to reduce delays and accidents during wintry weather conditions by pre-treating motorways and trunk roads to prevent the formation of ice and snow, and by clearing snow from carriageways and hard shoulders as soon as conditions permit. Local Authorities are responsible similar work on the local road network.

Salting Vehicles

- Salting vehicles travel at speeds of up to 40 mph spreading salt across all lanes of the carriageway. Ensure you maintain a safe distance behind these vehicles and do not attempt to overtake as they often spray salt at such a speed that it can damage your vehicle's bodywork

Snow Ploughing

- Snow ploughing can throw up irregular amounts of snow that may be a hazard to vehicles. Again, maintain a safe distance behind the vehicle and not to attempt to overtake

Road-works on motorways and major roads

The Highways Agency will be working on a number of major maintenance schemes and improvements on motorways and trunk roads in England over the winter and have advised drivers to plan their journeys accordingly. If you have to drive through road-works, take extra care:

- Keep to the speed limit, which is there for your safety
- Move into the correct lane in good time and avoid switching lanes
- Concentrate on the road ahead rather than the road-works
- Be alert for Highways Agency works traffic leaving or entering road-works
- Keep a safe distance between you and the vehicle in front, as you may have to quickly slow down for queues
- Observe all signs, which are there to help you