

Driving in winter weather

Introduction:

Living and working in the Midwest means having to drive in snowy and icy weather. Many accidents could be avoided if you take time to learn and practice safe driving during the winter months.

Hazards:

The No.1 wintertime driving hazard is loss of control of either your vehicle or a vehicle near you. Other hazards include reduced visibility due to snow or salt on the windshield, and/or decreased daylight hours.

Safe procedures:

- Always wear your seatbelt.
- Drive slower. Anticipate stops at traffic lights and intersections. Apply the brakes sooner than normal.
- Accelerate slowly to avoid loss of traction and loss of control. Turn slowly and with caution, to avoid sliding into a stationary object or the path of oncoming traffic.
- Always allow space between you and other vehicles to minimize the need for quick stops.
- During a skid, steer cautiously in the direction you want the car to go.
- If your vehicle does not have anti-lock brakes, brake carefully with short, rapid application of the brakes.

- Turn on your headlights during adverse weather conditions. It is important to see and be seen.
- Use extra caution on bridges and overpasses. They freeze before the roadway. In some cases they may be covered with invisible “black” ice.
- Driving in winter weather conditions causes physical and mental fatigue and reduces reaction times. Don’t drive while you’re sleepy or on medication that causes drowsiness. If you feel drowsy, pull into a road stop or over to the side of the road if you must. Take a nap or get out and walk around.
- Avoid distractions, such as cell phone use, eating, reading maps or other materials, and working with electronics (radio, MP3, GPS, etc).
- Prepare your vehicle well ahead of time. Check fluid levels especially windshield washer, tire pressure, lights and the battery.
- Stock an emergency kit containing heavy clothes and a blanket, sand or kitty litter, a small shovel, first aid kit, flashlight, jumper cables and a bright cloth to use as a flag.

In conclusion:

Poor weather-related driving conditions are associated with 7,000 fatalities, 800,000 injuries, and more than 1.5 million vehicular crashes annually in the United States. Bad weather will come. Make sure you are prepared!