

SAFETY MATTERS: PREPARE FOR WINTER DRIVING

It's that time of year again – the winter driving season is upon us. Although we've had it relatively easy for the past few years, there is no guarantee this winter will be as gentle or mild as the recent past. Here are some helpful reminders for preparing you and your vehicle for what's ahead.

Before winter weather arrives, check several of the safety components of your vehicle. In winter weather, all driving should be done with all-season tires or snow tires. Check your tires for tread depth, uneven wear, and tire pressure and be sure to follow the manufacturer's guidelines for the tire rotation schedule. The correct tire pressure can be found in your owner's manual and on a sticker that's visible when you open the driver's side door – the maximum pressure listed on the tire is the maximum, not the recommended pressure for driving. Be sure to check your windshield wipers for wear and top off your windshield washer fluid. If you're uncomfortable with these inspections, bring your car to a mechanic. Make a bag with equipment for each vehicle including an ice scraper, blanket, and small shovel. Your trip may take longer than usual, so be sure to fill your tank with gas, bring your phone charger, and any medications needed.



Children riding in car seats should be placed in clothes made of a lighter material. Thick puffy coats can interfere with the proper harness fit on a child in a car seat.

When your child is secured in a car seat, pick thin, warm layers, and place blankets or coats around your child after the harness is snug and secure for extra warmth. Also, make sure car seats and booster seats are properly installed and that any children riding with you are in the right seat for their age and size.

Avoid driving in extreme weather conditions whenever possible. If you have to drive, plan your route to avoid steep hills or sharp curves and stay on main roads. Make sure to turn on your lights – daytime running lights don't activate the lights at the rear of your vehicle and automatic lights won't always come on when it's snowing. If you find yourself stopped or stuck in wintry weather, stay with your car and make it as visible as possible by turning on your hazard lights and interior lights. Protect yourself from carbon monoxide poisoning by making sure the exhaust pipe is clear of snow and idle with the engine running for short periods of time. Don't run your engine for extended periods of time with the windows up or in an enclosed space.

After the storm, it's important to clear your vehicle of any snow or ice that has accumulated. Windshields can't be obscured by ice or snow while driving so be sure to clear them off completely including the windshield wipers. Connecticut has an "Ice Missile Law" that states drivers "*shall remove any accumulated ice or snow from such motor vehicle, including the hood, trunk and roof of such motor vehicle, so that any ice or snow accumulated on such vehicle does not pose a threat to persons or property while the vehicle is being operated on any street or highway of this state. Any operator who fails to remove accumulated ice or snow that poses such a threat shall be fined seventy-five dollars.*" If snow or ice from vehicles results in injury or property damage, drivers of non-commercial vehicles can be fined \$200 to \$1,000 and commercial drivers can be fined \$500 to \$1,250.

In the winter season the usual driving rules still apply: always wear your seat belt, no texting or driving distracted, and drive sober. Both alcohol and drugs can impair safe and responsible driving by affecting things such as coordination, judgment, perception, and reaction time. Last winter, over half of the crashes in Connecticut on icy, slushy, or snowy roads were speed related. Remember, all-wheel drive and four-wheel drive vehicles don't increase stopping distance or your ability to enter a corner faster than traditional vehicle systems. Slow down and increase the distance between you and the car in front of you, no matter what you're driving, to increase your chances of arriving safely.

By following the steps outlined above, allowing extra time, and being patient (especially of the crews clearing the roads), you'll be prepared to face whatever winter weather is coming our way.

References:

1. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/winter-driving-tips>
2. https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_248.htm#sec_14-252a