

A Dozen Tips for Safe Driving in Bad Weather

You don't have to live at the North Pole to experience weather that makes driving downright dangerous. Cloudbursts, dust storms, ice on the road, strong winds, blizzards and dense fog can strike almost anywhere.

Here are some tips to help you negotiate the road hazards unique to inclement weather.

1. Keep a safe distance between you and the vehicle in front of you. Wet or icy roads can require three to nine times more distance to stop than dry pavement. Use the four-second test to maintain a safe distance: When a vehicle in front of you passes a fixed object, allow four seconds before your car passes the same object.

2. If you get caught in a blizzard or blinding dust storm, pull off the highway as far as possible, put on your emergency flashers and stop. Wait it out. Winds can whip the snow into a condition called whiteout, in which the earth and sky seem to blend into each other. Dust and sand storms can be just as deadly. Better to be late for something than rush into certain danger.

3. Stay below posted speed limits. Traveling on a wet road at a high speed can cause your tires to lose contact with the road. This is called hydroplaning. If you start hydroplaning, the only way to regain control of your vehicle is to slow down. It may also help to drive in the tire tracks left by the vehicle ahead of you.

4. If you get caught in any type of skid, take your feet off both the gas *AND* the brakes and gently turn the steering wheel in the direction you want the front of your car to go. Jamming on the brakes can cause them to lock, making your vehicle impossible to control. Gently squeeze your brakes only after you've stopped skidding.

5. If you get stuck in snow, avoid spinning the wheels. Instead, point the front wheels straight ahead, shovel out snow in front of and behind all four wheels (and from under the car) and put sand, rock salt, cinders or traction mats just in front of the spinning wheels. If you have a stick shift, rock back and forth, rolling a little further each time. Once you're out, keep moving without gunning the gas.

6. Occasionally test your brakes when it's safe to slow down a moment. Gently pump them a few times before you apply steady pressure. If the brakes aren't slowing the car effectively, pull over as far to the right as possible, slow down by switching to low gear, pump the brakes until they work. If the brakes fail, coast against a snow bank or other "cushioned" barrier, if possible, until you come to a stop, and phone for a tow truck.

7. Use low gears when traveling on slick surfaces, especially up and down hills, to give added traction.

8. Keep your headlights on in any type of storm, even during the day.

9. If your windshield, other windows and headlights won't stay clear of snow, pull over safely, stop and clean them off. Good visibility is one of your most important safeguards against an accident.

10. When entering a patch of fog, slow down gradually and turn on your wipers and defroster. Also remember that high beams produce too much glare in fog. Low beams won't bounce back to blind you. If the fog is so thick that you can barely see in front of your car, pull off the road, keep the motor running, leave your headlights on and



turn on your flashers and inside lights until you can see well enough to continue.

11. Bridges, overpasses and shaded areas tend to freeze first and stay frozen longer than the rest of the road. Slow down when approaching these areas.

12. Don't drive through puddles if you think the water level is above the bottom of your hub caps. The water can get into your engine and cause serious damage and can also dampen your brakes.

And here's an extra tip: Listen to weather forecasts or call a weather information line in your area before driving somewhere. If weather and visibility are hazardous, and your trip is not urgent, stay home.

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