



# Planning, preparation, and patience:

## The keys to safe winter driving

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As the winter season approaches, it's time to rethink our driving habits. Winter driving is about planning, preparation, and patience.

### Planning

A bit of simple planning can make a trip, even a short one, go more smoothly. Before you leave, ask yourself a few questions: Which route will I be taking? Do I have an alternative route just in case? Should I leave a little earlier? Does my family know where I am going and which route I'm taking? Do they know when I am leaving and when I should arrive? Did I check the weather forecast and road reports? Do I have a cell phone available?

### Preparation

First and foremost, your vehicle should be ready for winter driving conditions. It seems that every year many people find out the hard way by having their truck or car break down due to lack of proper winter maintenance. At minimum, the following should be checked:

**Radiators** must have proper winter coolant. And be sure there are no leaks.

**Tires** should be rated for winter use and have treads that are deep enough to handle snow buildup. All-season tires are not designed for severe winter driving. Tires must also be properly inflated.

**Wipers** must be in good condition in order to clear snow and sleet off the windshield. Special winter wipers can also help prevent ice from building up. You also need winter-rated windshield-washer solution.

**Heaters and defrosters** that are working properly will keep your windshield clear and your passengers warm.

**Lights** are particularly important in winter so that other drivers can see you clearly. Be sure the headlights work on both high and low beams and are adjusted correctly. Check that the stop, tail, and clearance lights and the turn signals are clean and are working properly.

**Brakes** must be in the best of condition and balanced for uniform braking.

**Muffler and exhaust systems** should be in good condition and should be fitted tightly so that carbon monoxide does not seep into the vehicle, where it could lead to serious illness or death for the driver or passengers.

**Batteries** run down more quickly in cold weather. Make sure yours is in good condition. And in case your battery runs low, make sure you carry jumper cables and you know how to use them or use a booster battery if one is available.

**Windows and mirrors** need to be clean to ensure good visibility. Mirrors should also be properly adjusted.

### Don't forget:

- Carry an ice scraper or a broom for brushing snow off your vehicle; a shovel for deeper snow; sand or kitty litter for traction if your wheels should get stuck in the snow; and a towel for cleaning and drying your hands.
- Put an extra vehicle key in your pocket. Many motorists have locked themselves out of their car or truck when they were warming it up.

- Keep your fuel tank full. It may be necessary to change routes or turn back during a bad storm, or you may be caught in a traffic jam or a blizzard.

## Patience

We have all heard that patience is a virtue. When it comes to winter driving, patience is a must.

The leading causes of winter collisions are excessive speed, following too close, slippery roads, and poor visibility. Unfortunately, many of us don't think of those things until after a collision. The question is, why don't we think about them before we have a collision or even before we begin the trip?

True professional drivers continually think about these factors and consider them as challenges that can be solved. Our truck or car does what we want it to do or what we allow it to do. If it goes too fast, it's because we want it to. If it follows another vehicle too closely, it's because we want it to. If we lose control on slippery roads, we have allowed this to happen because we haven't adjusted our driving to the weather, road, traffic, and overall driving conditions.

For example, we may need to adjust our speed because we recognize that the conditions only allow for travel at 10 or 15 or 20 kilometres an hour even though the speed limit may be 80 or 90. Remember, snow and ice on the road can make your stopping distance three to 12 times as long as on a dry road. And don't think because you have anti-lock brakes you will be safe. Anti-lock brakes are a great safety

tool, but they don't make your car or truck stop any faster or in a shorter distance.

## Safe travel around snowplows

It is important to give snowplows room to do their job. They may be spreading sand or salt from the truck as well as plowing, or they may need to stop or drive around a stranded car.

- If you find yourself behind a snowplow, stay behind it—the road behind a plow will be safer to drive on than the road in front. If you must pass, use caution.
- Don't crowd the plow. Snowplows clear a wide swath—sometimes very wide. The front plow extends several feet in front of the truck and may cross the centre line and shoulders during plowing operations.
- Plows often turn and leave the road. Give them plenty of room. Stay back at least 150 metres.
- On multi-lane roads, snowplows may be wider than one lane or there may be two or three plows working together.
- A plow can throw up a cloud of snow that can reduce visibility to zero in less time than you can react. Be smart. Never drive into a cloud of snow—it could be hiding a snowplow.
- A plow driver's field of vision is very limited. You may see him, but he may not see you.

There is a lot more to winter driving than just starting the vehicle and going. Safe winter driving is a skill; it doesn't just happen. It takes planning, preparation, and patience by the driver.

## If you are trapped in a car during a blizzard

- Do not leave the car to look for help unless help is visible. You may lose your bearings and get lost in blowing and drifting snow.
- Display a trouble sign—hang a brightly coloured cloth on the radio antenna and open the hood.
- Turn on the heater occasionally to keep warm, but only when the engine is running. Don't turn on the dome light inside the car except when the engine is running. Run the engine for about 10 minutes every hour.
- Beware of carbon monoxide poisoning. Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow. To get fresh air, open a window slightly on the downwind side.
- Try not to stay in one position for too long. If there is more than one person in the car, take turns sleeping. Huddle together to keep warm. For added insulation, use newspapers, maps, and even the car mats.
- Avoid overexertion. Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Exercise that you are not used to, such as shovelling snow or pushing a car, can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse.
- To avoid dehydration, keep some bottles of water in the car and take a drink now and then.

