

Driving in Winter Weather

The days are getting shorter. Leaves have fallen from the trees. All are signs that Old Man Winter has arrived. For motorists, the change of season conjures up thoughts of bone-chilling, subzero temperatures and long, uncomfortable waits while their car warms up. Winter is the most difficult driving season. Not only do you have snow and ice to deal with, but there are fewer hours of daylight as well. Winter driving can be inconvenient, annoying, even infuriating, but there are measures you can take as a driver to offset these aggravations.

Winter weather poses significant driving challenges, but there are many things we can do to keep Old Man Winter at bay. Since weather conditions can be unpredictable, it is important to be well-prepared for winter driving. Get your vehicle winter-ready with a maintenance check-up. Don't wait to have your tires, battery, belts, hoses, radiator, oil, lights, brakes, exhaust system, heater/defroster, wipers and ignition system checked.

While it is best to avoid driving in winter weather conditions, if you must venture out on the roads, you should keep in mind the three key elements of safe winter driving: Stay alert, slow down and stay in control. Drive according to road and weather conditions. Keep a safe distance between you and the vehicle in front of you to avoid situations where you may have to brake suddenly on a slippery surface. A small patch of black ice, a brief white-out, a moment of inattention and you can find yourself stuck or off the road and waiting for assistance. As with everything else in life, preparation makes all the difference. Here's what you will want to have on hand, especially in an emergency:

- Snow shovel;
- Scraper with a brush on one end;
- Tow chain or strap;
- Tire chains;
- Flashlight (with extra batteries);
- Abrasive material (cat litter, sand, salt or traction mats);
- Jumper cables;
- Warning device (flares or reflective triangles);
- Brightly colored cloth to signal for help;
- Empty coffee or similar type can containing candles, matches (in a water tight container) or a lighter, high-energy food (chocolate or dried fruit, for example);
- Sleeping bags or blankets, ski caps, and mittens;
- First-aid supplies

Winter weather conditions can come quickly, making previously clear roads hard to navigate even for seasoned drivers. By being prepared, you will be better suited to take on Old Man Winter and arrive safely at your destination.

References:

The National Safety Council

www.nsc.org

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

www.osha.gov

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

www.nhtsa.dot.gov

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<http://editorial.autos.msn.com>

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