

Sergeant Bob's Winter Safety Tips

Retired Police Sergeant Bob Paterson works with The McLennan Group Insurance Inc. to develop practical safety tips for CARP members.

"Don't gamble with your safety. The stakes are too high."

Winter Driving Survival Guide

There is no shortage of well-intentioned advice when it comes to safe driving in winter weather. Here is a short review of the root causes that, when combined, place drivers at increased risk.

Low Temperature Awareness

A winter driver's first priority is to establish an appreciation for just how cold it is. Seems simple enough, but technological advances have left winter drivers very comfortable and somewhat insulated from the cold reality:

- All wheel drive, plus traction and stability control;
- Heated seats, windshields and mirrors;
- Improved road salting and ice control technology;
- Increased use of winter tires;
- Automatic Braking Systems, etc.

While these features can help us avoid a collision, we can be halfway to our destination before realizing just how cold and slippery it actually is. Modern vehicle owners can now drive well beyond our skill level in total comfort. When trouble does occur, even a skilled rally car driver would have difficulty making a safe recovery.

- Tip #1:** If you need a coat and/or it's slippery under foot, expect low road surface temperatures. Slow down and don't unknowingly drive beyond your skill level in harsh winter conditions.

Low Adhesion

When temperatures are low, the adhesion – or grip between tire and road surfaces – weakens dramatically. Most cars and light trucks only have a tire to road adhesion area about the size of your open palm. As vehicle speeds rise and temperatures fall, the adhesion area is weakened. Subsequently, as the tire to road adhesion fails, so does steering, braking, and overall vehicle control.

- Tip #2:** Preserve the fragile adhesion between rubber and road by keeping speeds lower. Don't intentionally surrender grip and vehicle control by driving too fast for the weather conditions. Be aware that as temperatures drop past the freezing point, major adjustments in speed, steering input, braking and following distances are required.



Low Light

In most of Canada, winter brings shorter daylight periods. Leaving home and returning in darkness is a reality for many winter drivers. There is nothing a winter driver can do but to develop an appreciation for reduced sight range and make reasonable speed adjustments.

Low light/no light environmental conditions place greater demands on concentration and more frequent rest stops during long journeys.

Winter Tires Are Your Best Bet

If you never have to operate your vehicle in nasty winter weather, then a good quality, correctly inflated "all season" tire will be perfect for you. However, if you occasionally or routinely drive in poor weather, most experts recommend that you install four winter tires on your vehicle, every year.

Yes, "all season" and "all weather" tires are improving dramatically. But so are premium winter tires. While modern winter tires have a more aggressive tread pattern, the real advantage is the rubber compound that stays compliant and sticky as temperatures fall. Maximized road surface adhesion and the shedding of water / slush are the primary objectives of a specifically designed winter tire.

Regardless of the vehicle's features (all wheel drive, four wheel drive, front wheel drive, traction control, etc.) no "all season" tire can match the low temperature performance of a specifically designed winter tire. Shop and select good winter tires (putting them on spare rims is best) and feel the difference.

Winter Driving Survival Guide Continued...

Low Visibility

We can improve our view and be more conspicuous to others during nasty weather. Tempting as it may be to drive while peering through frosted windows it's simply an accident waiting to happen. The problem is compounded by the reality that you may be surrounded by other drivers who hope their defroster and repeated windshield washing will open a clear view before they crash into something. Bundled up pedestrians also rely on you to be extra vigilant.

- ❑ **Tip #3:** Simply clear away dirt, salt, snow and ice from vehicle lights, windows, wipers, and mirrors etc. Scraping ice and snow from your vehicle can be uncomfortable and several minutes will be added to your trip, but it's the only way to go. Your best bet is to always plan for extra trip time in winter months.

Once underway, remember to use the full vehicle lighting package (front and rear lights), signal your intention to turn, and use your four way emergency flashers if you approach sudden traffic interruptions or you become disabled.

Traffic Light Outages

Traffic light failure can be more frequent and widespread during winter storms. If you're faced with a disabled or malfunctioning traffic light, approach with caution and treat the situation as though it's a flashing four-way red light. Stop and proceed with caution, only when it's safe do so. Before proceeding double check your sight lines to the left and the right, be extra careful and assume that an approaching driver is not aware of the signal disruption and is about to cross right across your path.

During a traffic signal disruption a risky left hand turn should be avoided when an alternate route is available, and don't forget to follow the direction of a police officer who has temporarily taken control of an intersection.

Low Vehicle Maintenance

The effects of poor vehicle maintenance are never greater than when you're struggling through an ice storm or deep snow. Winter vehicle preparation can give you a distinct advantage especially if winter driving duties include long commutes, demanding sport schedules and children's activities.



- ❑ **Tip #4:** Start with the basics like winter tire selection but remember the other critical components: heater, defroster, wiper blades, washer fluid, all lights and signals, and mechanical items that will reduce the likelihood of a roadside breakdown.

Low vehicle maintenance standards are a critical concern in urban, suburban and rural locations. Being stranded in a remote location during freezing conditions or sliding across six lanes of traffic during a city rush hour is not how your journey should end.

Give yourself every advantage during nasty weather: pack a winter survival kit, carry a cell phone, keep fuel levels above half, and be extremely careful if your vehicle is disabled near live traffic. If disabled, get the four-way flashers on quickly and consider conditions for any traffic approaching your vehicle before standing at the rear or searching through the trunk.

Winter Driving Summary

Whenever possible, stay off the road during nasty winter weather, especially if you're an uncomfortable or anxious driver. Take a winter driving course. Nothing beats an in-car winter training session with a skilled instructor. When you're feeling up to the challenges of winter driving, get your vehicle prepared.

Finally, be aware of who's transporting your loved ones and what vehicle is being used. A tragic winter crash is rarely an "accident" but the result of avoidable and predictable circumstances. Modern traffic collision analysis suggests that vehicle control is rarely if ever "lost". Sadly, vehicle control is "surrendered" unintentionally through low skill level and low vehicle maintenance.



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