



## **Blustery days ahead: Make sure your car, skills are ready for another icy blast**

As any driver knows, snow and ice make roads slippery and dangerous, especially when the temperature is at or below freezing. What's more, hard-packed snow makes a vehicle more prone to skidding. The bottom line: Winter is not the easiest time to be driving.

According to the National Safety Council, in 2002 the highest monthly mileage death rate of 1.66 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles occurred in July, September and December. The overall rate for the year was 1.56.

Drivers can avoid becoming a statistic by exercising caution and driving defensively. The North Carolina Department of Transportation recommends that during winter, drivers watch for shady spots, bridges and overpasses, because these places often are the first to freeze as the temperature drops.

If you must be on the road during a snowstorm, reduce your speed, use windshield wipers and turn on low-beam headlights. Reduce your vehicle's speed by more than half for packed snow, and slow to a crawl on ice. Use chains if necessary for better traction, but don't forget that even chains and snow tires can slide on ice or packed snow. A driver cannot start, stop or maneuver a vehicle quickly in these conditions. As always, watch out for other drivers.

When you are starting or stopping on snowy or icy roads, follow this advice from the North Carolina DOT:

- Accelerate more gradually than you would in normal driving conditions.
- Get the "feel of the road" by testing steering control and brake friction.
- If your car has a manual transmission, start to move in second gear or higher gear, and release the clutch slowly.
- When you begin to slow down, allow a minimum of three times the ordinary stopping distance.
- When you begin to stop, keep your foot off the brake and let the engine slow the vehicle.
- Maintain extra following distance between yourself and the vehicle in front of you.

When wintry weather strikes, don't get caught out on the road unprepared. Make sure your vehicle is stocked with all the necessities for harsh weather. The National Safety Council offers this advice:

- Take care of routine vehicle maintenance. Check the ignition, brakes, wiring, hoses and fan belts.
- Change and adjust the spark plugs.
- Check the air, fuel and emission filters, and the PCV valve.
- Check the tires for air, sidewall wear and tread depth.
- Check the antifreeze level and the freeze line.

The council also recommends drivers keep the following equipment in their cars at all times:

- A properly inflated spare tire, wheel wrench and tripod-type jack
- A shovel
- Jumper cables
- Tow and tire chains
- A bag of salt or cat litter
- A tool kit



- A fully stocked first aid kit
- Exterior windshield cleaner
- A compass
- A working flashlight and extra batteries (check expiration dates)
- Reflective triangles and a brightly colored cloth
- A blanket
- An ice scraper and snow brush

The key to winter driving safety is to be prepared and take things slowly. Watch yourself and other drivers on the road and take extra precautions, like leaving a little earlier for work, so you won't have to rush. By watching out for yourself and others, everyone will get home safely.

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