Winter Weather Safety and Preparedness

Winter Safety Tips for the Vehicle

Winterize your vehicle. Get a tune-up and be sure to check the battery levels in your vehicle. Consider buying snow tires or chains for the tires, as your travel dictates. Chains work best on glare ice. Be sure to check with local authorities on tire chains. Some locales prohibit their use.

Other vehicle care tips include:

- Check radiator coolant and sturdiness of hoses and belts
- Refer to the vehicle's manual to see if a lighter grade oil is recommended for winter driving
- Change burned out headlights, tail lights and turn signals
- Check tire tread and wear – minimum tread is 1/16" for adequate traction.
- Make sure brakes are in proper working order
- Keep spare window washer fluid in the trunk and make sure the washer blades are in good working condition

Prepare a winter emergency kit for your vehicle. Supplies should include:

- At least two blankets or a sleeping bag
- Flashlight or battery-powered lantern and extra batteries
- Booster (jumper) cables
- Emergency flares
- Extra clothing, particularly boots, hats and mittens
- A steel shovel and rope to use as a lifeline
- Bottled water or juice and nonperishable high-energy foods (granola bars, raisins, nuts, peanut butter or cheese crackers)
- First-aid kit and necessary medications
- Sand or non-clumping cat litter for tire traction, if your vehicle gets stuck in snow or ice
- A cell phone and car charger
- Ice scraper and snow brush

Winter-wise Driving Tips

- Pay attention to weather reports on the radio. Allow time in your schedule for bad weather and/or traffic delays.
- Become familiar with your vehicle's winter weather operating characteristics. Front-wheel-drive vehicles generally handle better than rear-wheel vehicles on slippery roads because the weight of the engine is on the drive wheels, improving traction.
- Keep your windows clear of snow and ice. Remember to clean head, tail and brake lights.
- If you need to turn on your wipers, you need to turn on your headlights.
- Bridges become slick and icy before roads. Bridge temperatures can be five to six degrees colder than roadways, so drive with extreme caution during freezing temperatures.
- Keep your gas tank at least half full. Fill the tank before you park for lengthy periods. This will help prevent fuel line freeze-up.
- Leave ample stopping time between you and the drive in front of you. Braking distance can be up to nine times greater on snowy, icy surfaces than on dry roads.
- If your vehicle is equipped with an Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), be sure to: STOMP – firmly depress the brake pedal. STAY on the brakes – do not pump the brakes. STEER where you want the vehicle to go.
- Gently pump non-ABS brakes to stop the vehicle. Take any corrective action gradually. You need to maintain full control of the vehicle. Refer to the vehicle operations manual for proper methods to correct skids.
- During winter travel, it is best to supply those at your destination with the following information: your cell phone number, departure time, travel route and anticipated arrival time.
- Lock your vehicle, even in bad weather. If locks freeze, heat the key. Do not pour hot water on the locks – they will refreeze.
- Stay with your vehicle while warming it up. An unattended, running car invites theft.

Survival Tips if Stranded

The best advice is to remain with the vehicle. If nothing else, you are guaranteed shelter. Other helpful tips include:

- Tie a bright colored cloth (handkerchief, towel, etc.) to the vehicle's antenna, driver door handle or outside mirror.
- Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow. Poisonous gases can filter into the vehicle if the pipe is clogged.
- Run the engine and heater no more than 10 minutes every hour, leaving a downwind window slightly open for ventilation while the engine is running.
- Light a flare or turn on a flashlight to let others know you're stranded in the vehicle.
- Use floor mats, seat covers and blankets for added warmth. If you must leave your vehicle during a severe snow storm or blizzard, secure a line of rope or cod to yourself and the vehicle to avoid becoming lost or disoriented.
- Keep bottled water in your emergency kit of vehicle. Never eat snow. It will chill you and lower your body temperature.

- Remain calm. Chances for rescue are better if you remain calm and in your vehicle.