



WEATHER

Safety Tips for Driving in Severe Wet Winter Weather

Source: Keenan & Associates

Severe weather can be both frightening and dangerous for automobile travel. Wet roads mean poor traction. Conditions are the most dangerous during the first 10 minutes of a heavy downpour as oil and debris wash away. When the rain starts to fall and pavement is wet, your likelihood of a crash is higher than during wintry conditions like snow, sleet, and ice, according to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Whether it is water, snow, sleet or ice, conditions can be dangerous. According to NHTSA, in 2019 there were 440 fatal crashes, and an estimated 33,000 injury crashes that occurred in wintry conditions.

After averaging 10 years of statistics, NHTSA researchers found that 46 percent of weather-related crashes happened during rainfall, but just 18 percent while it was snowing or sleeting. Those statistics are partially explained by the fact that many drivers stay home during bad snowstorms. Statistics also reflect that drivers do not respect the rain and fail to adjust their driving habits to wet hazardous conditions.

Below are several wet weather driving tips to follow:

- First and foremost - slow down! It takes longer to stop or adjust in wet weather. People are so used to driving certain speeds on certain roads that sometimes they forget the need to slow down in wet, wintry weather.
- Always keep a cell phone and charger (backup power) in your vehicle for emergency use.
- Before it starts to rain, replace old or brittle wipers. In addition, motorists should regularly check that their headlights, taillights, brake lights and turn signals are working properly.
- Make certain your tires are properly inflated. When the temperature drops so does the tire inflation pressure. A tire's recommended inflation pressure can be found in small typeface on the side of the tire near the rim. Check your tire tread on a regular basis. Bald tires significantly reduce your traction on wet roadways and offer little resistance to hydroplaning. Never mix radial tires with other tire types.
- When you begin a trip in rain or snow, your shoes will be wet and may slip off the pedals. Scuff the soles on the rubber matting or carpeting of the car before you start the engine.
- Avoid driving while you are fatigued to ensure you will remain alert when driving in wet or slippery conditions.
- Do not use cruise control when driving on any slippery surface (wet, ice, sand).
- Use your seat belt every time you get into your vehicle.

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- Stay toward the middle lanes - water tends to pool in the outside lanes.
 - Maintain proper following distance. The “3 Second Rule” should be increased to 5 seconds in wet weather.
 - Drive in the tracks created by the car ahead of you.
 - Do not follow large trucks or buses too closely. The spray created by their large tires reduces your visibility. Take care when passing them as well; if you must pass, do so promptly and safely.
 - Pay attention to local media reports and heed warnings issued by the National Weather Service. Do not drive if a flash flood warning is issued.
 - Never drive around barricades at water crossings.
 - Ensure you have a flashlight and batteries.
 - Allow enough driving time and plan your route.
 - Drive cautiously on bridges, shady areas, and overpasses in cold, windy weather as ice can form on the roadway.
 - Stay with your vehicle if stalled, this will allow you to maintain warmth.
 - Don’t panic if you begin to slide. Take your foot off the gas pedal, don’t use the brake, and steer the vehicle in the direction you wish to travel.
 - Avoid using your brakes excessively; if possible, take your foot off the accelerator to slow down.
 - Turn your headlights on even in a light rain, or in gloomy, foggy, or overcast conditions. Not only do they help you see the road, but they will help other drivers see *you*. If your car has daytime running lights you still should put them on, so vehicles behind you can see you better.
 - Avoid off-road driving. It is difficult to judge the actual depth of puddles and you can easily become stuck, even in an SUV.
 - Bring tire chains, an abrasive material (such as kitty litter) windshield scraper, shovel jumper cables, blanket, food, and water if you expect to travel through higher elevations.
 - Never drive beyond the limits of visibility. At night, rainy roads become especially dangerous. The glare of oncoming lights, amplified by the rain on your windshield, can cause temporary loss of visibility while substantially increasing driver fatigue. In rainy conditions pedestrians, livestock, and wildlife are extremely hard to spot and even harder to avoid.

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- Try to avoid driving through moving water, especially if you cannot see the ground through it as your car could be swept off the road. Driving through water creates less tire contact with the road surface (hydroplaning) and increases your chance of crashing.
 - Driving through water affects your brakes, reducing their effectiveness until they dry out.
 - Be aware that road erosion can occur anytime there is running or standing water on a roadway.
 - When visibility is so limited that the edges of the road or other vehicles cannot be seen at a safe distance, it is time to pull off the road and wait for the rain to ease up. Keep your headlights on and turn on emergency flashers to alert other drivers of your position.
 - Become familiar with your vehicle's Traction Control features and Antilock Braking System, as they are made for rainy days. These systems prevent the wheels from slipping on wet pavement and help the driver maintain control when stopping or accelerating in the rain.
 - If possible, stay off the road during heavy thunderstorms. Large flashes of lightning can temporarily blind and disorient drivers, and the accompanying high winds and heavy rain can create extreme driving conditions.
 - If you end up in water, immediately abandon your vehicle, exit through a window, and climb on top of your car. Call 9-1-1 from there and wait for help to arrive. Ride the top like a boat, as vehicles will often float for several minutes.
 - In an emergency, stay focused, stay with your car, don't overexert yourself, let your car be seen (place bright markers on the antenna or windows), be mindful of carbon dioxide poisoning (make sure your exhaust pipe is clear of any snow and run car sporadically).

Should you have any questions regarding this Bulletin or would like additional information, please contact your Keenan Loss Control Consultant at www.keenan.com or info@keenan.com.