

Keeping Minnesota *Ready*



FRIDAY – WINTER DRIVING AND TRAVEL

Winter driving in Minnesota can be challenging and potentially dangerous. Cold, snow and ice are demanding on drivers and passengers and on cars too. Slick and snowy roads can make driving stressful. Cold affects metal, rubber and other materials in your car. It can reduce the effectiveness of your vehicle's battery. The combined effects can make even simple travel hazardous. However, following a few simple guidelines and tips listed below can help make your winter travels a little safer and easier.

WINTER SAFETY CHECKLISTS - FOR DRIVING AND TRAVEL

PREPARE YOUR VEHICLE FOR WINTER

Before winter arrives, be sure your vehicle is ready. A breakdown in subzero cold is not the time you want to find out something is wrong. The checklist here is a good starting point. Check to see these items are all in good working condition. If you aren't sure, many auto repair shops offer a winterizing service in the fall to make sure your car is ready.

- Battery
- Wipers and washer fluid
- Antifreeze
- Ignition system
- Thermostat
- Lights
- Exhaust system
- Flashing hazard lights
- Heater
- Brakes
- Defroster
- Oil level
- Tires and air pressure — consider getting snow tires or chains

BEFORE you drive

- Check current road conditions. Go to the MnDOT traffic center www.Mn511.org for the latest road condition information.
- Set the car radio to stations that regularly broadcast weather warnings, traffic reports and instructions.
- Assemble an emergency kit and keep it in the vehicle throughout the season.
- Keep essential items in the car. Include paper road maps (even if you have GPS), a cell phone with charger, a shovel, windshield scraper, tow rope, booster cables, a whistle and a reflector or brightly colored cloth to use as a distress signal. Include a bag of sand/salt or non-clumping cat litter to place under tires if stuck in snow or ice.
- For long trips, tell someone where you are going, the routes you intend to travel and when you expect to return. When you reach your destination, call to report you have arrived.
- Stay on designated roads or detours. Avoid "short cuts" off main highways, as these may not be plowed or patrolled.
- Before leaving town, fill your gas tank. While traveling, stop frequently to refill your tank.

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ON THE ROAD

- Always buckle your seat belt!
- Brake properly to avoid skidding. If driving on snow or ice, start slowly and brake gently. Begin braking extra early when approaching an intersection.
- If you start to slide, ease off the gas pedal or brakes. Steer into the direction of the skid until you regain traction. Then straighten your vehicle. If you have antilock brakes, apply steady pressure.
- On cloudy days, or during snow or in fog, drive with headlights set on. Use fog lights if necessary.
- In rain, fog, snow or sleet, stay within the limits of your vision. If it is too difficult to see, pull off the road and stop. Turn on hazard blinkers.
- Decrease speed and increase following distance on hazardous roads. Your speed should adjust for conditions without becoming an impediment to traffic flow.
- Watch for slick spots, especially on bridges and overpasses. Be physically and mentally prepared to react.
- Never try to pass in blowing snow, as there may be vehicles ahead you cannot see.
- Be alert for snowplows. When a plow is coming toward you, allow plenty of room for it to pass. Its blade may cross the centerline. Allow extra distance between your vehicle and service vehicles, as they may be spreading salt.
- NEVER drive into a snow cloud. A snow plow may be ahead clearing the lane or preparing to turn around.
- Be careful after any minor accident. If you are bumped from behind and do not feel comfortable exiting your vehicle, motion to the other driver and drive to the nearest safe place to stop, such as a 24-hour store.
- Be prepared to turn back and seek shelter if conditions become threatening.

IF YOU BECOME STRANDED:

- If you break down, pull as far off the road as possible. Your greatest threat at this point is being hit by passing cars. Turn on emergency flashers.
- Stay in the car. You could become disoriented and lost trying to walk in a snowstorm.
- If you have a cell phone, call 9-1-1 for help. Do not turn off your cell phone. Most modern phones have locating signals that can help rescuers pinpoint your location.
- Display a trouble sign. Attach a brightly colored cloth to your car's antenna or door.
- Run the engine occasionally to keep warm. Turn on the engine for 10 minutes each hour. Run the heater during this time. Recharge your cell phone if possible.
- Beware of carbon monoxide accumulation. Clear snow away from the exhaust pipe and open a downwind window slightly for ventilation.
- If it is dark, turn on your vehicle's interior light to make it easier for rescuers to find you.
- Avoid over-exertion . Cold weather puts added strain on the heart. Shoveling snow or pushing a car in freezing temperatures can cause a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse.
- If you are outside, watch for signs of hypothermia or frostbite.
- Use your emergency kit as necessary. Stay hydrated if possible

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WHEN DIALING 911 ON A CELLULAR TELEPHONE: MAKE SURE RESPONDERS CAN FIND YOU

A cell phone is a valuable tool for drivers who witness, or are involved in, emergency situations. Cell phone users on the road need to provide dispatchers with specific information about the emergency.

All cellular 911 calls are routed to public safety answering points operated by state or local public safety agencies. Although more newer cell phones now provide approximate location and callback number when 911 is dialed, an exact location may have to be provided by the caller. When making a 911 call from your cell phone, follow these steps:

- Tell the 911 dispatcher that you are calling from a cell phone and provide the cell phone number.
- Report the nature of the problem (traffic accident, medical emergency, stalled vehicle, etc.)
- Give location information.
- Give information on number of persons and types of injuries, if any.
- Remain calm and stay on the line until help arrives or the dispatcher tells you to hang up.
- Don't put yourself in danger. Stay near the emergency scene only if it is safe to do so.

The Minnesota State Patrol urges cell phone users to be prepared to provide the dispatcher with their location, the exact location of the emergency and the number of the cell phone they are using. The following details can help in remembering your location in case of an emergency:

- Mile markers and highway exit numbers
- The county or state highway number or road on which you're driving
- The county or city in which you're driving
- The direction of travel
- Distinctive landmarks

SNOWPLOW SAFETY

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's snowplow operators are trained, experienced and prepared to assist motorists through another winter season.

Operators have much to monitor and control, and their ability to see behind them is limited by side mirrors. Their vision can also be hampered by the snow clouds they create while plowing. Remember that a fully equipped truck can weigh as much as 15 times more than an average car.

Safe driving means:

- ❖ **Check road conditions** at www.511mn.org or call 511; it takes time to get roads back to good driving conditions.
- ❖ **Be patient** and remember snowplows are working to improve road conditions for your trip.
- ❖ **Stay back** at least five car lengths behind the plow, far from the snow cloud. Snowplow operators will pull over when it is safe to do so to allow traffic build-up to pass.
- ❖ **Stay alert** for snowplows that turn or exit frequently and often with little warning. They may also travel over centerlines or partially in traffic to further improve road conditions.
- ❖ **Slow down** to a safe speed for current conditions, and give yourself plenty of travel time. Snowplows typically move at slower speeds.
- ❖ **Buckle up** and ensure children are properly secured in the correct child restraint.
- ❖ Avoid unnecessary travel if road conditions are too poor.

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SNOW REMOVAL TECHNIQUES

MnDOT's snow removal program sets goals based on public safety and driver expectations. MnDOT uses market research to determine how quickly the public expects roads to be cleared when setting a performance goal.

Snow removal performance can vary depending on moisture content of the snow, weather conditions and timing of the snow fall. A snowfall that occurs before and during a rush hour will cause more problems than snow falling from midnight to 3 a.m. Heavy, wet snow followed by a cold snap will require more time to clear than dry snow.

MnDOT primarily uses two materials to improve roadway safety and inhibit ice formation:

- Salt – Melts snow and ice on roads when road surface temperatures are below freezing. Salt loses its effectiveness as temperatures drop.
- Sand – Increases traction for motorists on slippery roads, mostly used at intersections and ramps. It may also be used in extreme cold temperatures when salt is less effective.

The following techniques help MnDOT be more efficient and use less salt and sand, which reduces our impact on the environment.

- Anti-icing – Generally refers to applying liquid salt brine to the road surface just before or early in a snowfall event. This prevents precipitation from bonding to the road surface.
- Pre-wetting – A treatment to rock salt or sand that involves applying liquid salt brine or other commercial chemical solutions to the salt or sand mixture. Pre-wetting the salt allows the salt to activate more quickly and cause it to stick to the road surface instead of blowing off to the shoulder and ditch.
- De-icing – Uses chemical or mechanical means to break the bond that has formed between the ice and road surface.

For more information on and highway safety and road conditions contact:

Minnesota Dept. of Transportation (MnDOT)

651-296-3000 or 800-657-3774

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/>

or www.511mn.org or dial 511