



# Severe weather driving tips

## Zurich Risk Engineering

**The First thing to consider is whether your journey is absolutely necessary – if the emergency services are advising against travelling, consider postponing your journey until the conditions improve. Assuming you have to travel, drivers should follow a few simple tips to make their winter journeys as safe as possible.**

### **Check your vehicle:**

- Has been maintained/serviced and you have a good battery. Your battery has to work much harder in the winter (working lights and wipers, for example) and can fail completely with hardly any warning.
- Tyres have a good tread depth and are inflated correctly (including the spare).
- Cooling system contains antifreeze at the correct strength, and is at the correct level.
- Windscreen wipers and washers are working properly, and the washer fluid has additives to prevent freezing and is fully topped up.
- Lights are clean and working.

### **Check the weather conditions:**

- Check your local and national TV and Radio for travel and weather information.
- Postpone your journey, if at all possible, until conditions improve.
- Ensure all windows and mirrors are clear from mist, frost and snow, at the start and throughout your journey. Snow and ice reduce your visibility, and can be dangerous to other road users as it falls off your vehicle.

### **In extreme weather conditions such as falling snow:**

- Ask yourself if your journey is essential, and if conditions deteriorate during your journey, would it be safer to stop/turn back and wait for conditions to improve?
- Check to see if you have a full tank of fuel.
- Let someone know your destination and your expected time of arrival.
- Take a mobile phone if you have one (but don't use it whilst you are driving), and take warm clothing, hot drinks, food, boots, a torch and shovel as well – you could become stranded for a long time.

### **If you are out on the roads in poor conditions:**

- Use the main roads which have been treated as much as possible, but do not assume that they will be free of ice and snow – deteriorating weather conditions after treatment can mean that conditions can still be extremely hazardous. Maps of treated routes are normally available on Council websites.
- Allow extra time for your journey.
- Avoid the rush hour, wherever possible, to help reduce congestion.

### **Generally, when driving in wintry weather:**

- Drive according to the conditions – on treated and untreated roads.
- Reduce speed in poor visibility, where there is snow, or if ice may have formed.
- Use the highest gear possible to help keep control of the vehicle and avoid any harsh braking, acceleration or steering.
- Increase your following distances – two seconds between vehicles is for good conditions! On wet roads you need to be at least four seconds behind the vehicle in front, and in icy conditions you need to allow much greater following distances.
- Use dipped headlights in poor visibility and snow, so others can see you!
- Use rear fog lights in poor visibility (less than 100 metres) but remember to switch them off when conditions improve.
- Watch out for other road users, including motorbikes, pushbikes, pedestrians and children, who may also be having difficulties in the conditions.

#### **If you do break down:**

- If you get into trouble, stay with your vehicle, if possible, until help arrives.
- On motorways it is safest to leave the vehicle, by the nearside doors, and wait well away from the vehicle. If you need to return to the vehicle for warmth, ensure that all occupants are wearing their seatbelts in case of a collision.
- If you do have to leave your vehicle, make yourself visible to others. Ensure that you carry high-visibility jackets, and put these on before leaving your vehicle, and never obscure any of your vehicle's lights as this will make it more difficult for on-coming traffic to see your vehicle.
- If you have to abandon your vehicle, give local police the details and park safely to avoid obstructing emergency services and maintenance vehicles, such as snow ploughs.

#### **General advice in adverse weather:**

**Fog** is often a hazard in autumn and winter, and is a major factor in many collisions.

- Slow down, keep your distance, and turn your lights on in fog.
- Drive very slowly using dipped headlights. Use fog lights if visibility is seriously reduced (less than 100 metres), but remember to switch them off when visibility improves.
- Don't hang on the tail lights of the vehicle in front – this gives you a false sense of security and means you may be driving too close.
- Don't speed up suddenly – even if it seems to be clearing, you can suddenly find yourself back in thick fog.

**Ice, snow and slush** drastically reduce the ability of your tyres to grip the road, which means that slowing down, speeding up, or changing direction all become hazardous. The trick to driving in these conditions is to be as smooth as possible.

- Drive slowly, allowing extra space to stop safely.
- It can take ten times longer to stop in icy conditions than on a dry road.
- Use the highest gear possible, manoeuvre gently, and avoid harsh braking and acceleration.
- To brake on ice and snow, get into a low gear earlier than normal, allow your speed to fall gradually, and use the brake pedal gently.
- If you start skidding, steer more gently and/or ease off the accelerator but do not brake suddenly.

**Floods:** It is best not to enter floodwater at all – if you can, take an alternative route. If you enter floodwater:

- Drive slowly in first gear, but keep the engine speed high by slipping the clutch (or in vehicles with automatic transmissions, select a low gear and use the brake and accelerator to maintain a slow road speed c/w a high engine revs) – this will stop you from stalling.
- Go through the water one vehicle at a time, and avoid waves formed by other vehicles.
- Avoid the deepest water, which is generally near the kerb. Don't attempt to cross if the water seems too deep. Watch others!
- Remember – test your brakes a few times after you are through the flood before you drive at normal speed.

#### **Remember:**

- Be sure to give cyclists and motorcyclists extra room in bad weather.
- Dazzle from the low winter sun can be dangerous. Carry a pair of sunglasses in the car.
- It takes twice as long to stop on a wet road as it does on a dry one, and up to ten times longer in icy conditions.

For more information on this or any other aspect of work-related road risk management please contact Zurich Risk Engineering on **+44 (0)121 697 9131**.