

Winter Driving: Be Prepared

Winter conditions often impair visibility, making it hard for a driver to see and to be seen. If possible, avoid driving when visibility is low. If you must drive, use your headlights on low and drive slowly. Pull over to the side of the road if conditions worsen.

Before getting in your vehicle, clean snow and ice from the entire vehicle (i.e., roof, windows, mirrors, lights, trunk, hood). Snow and ice can be blown off of a moving vehicle obscuring the windshield or even hitting other vehicles. You can turn on the heater for a few minutes before using the defroster to prevent warm air from fogging the windshield when it hits the cold glass.

Starting Out

Traction is greatest before the wheels spin, so gentle pressure on the accelerator will help avoid skids. If the wheels start to spin, let up on the accelerator until traction returns. If more traction is needed, put traction mats or sand, cat litter, or another abrasive substance under the wheels.

Following

The three- to four-second rule for following another vehicle only applies to dry pavement. In wet or slick conditions, the distance should be increased to eight to 10 seconds, which allows for more time to stop. Leave plenty of room between yourself and other vehicles in case you have to steer around a skidding or stopped vehicle. In slick conditions and at speeds over 25 mph, steering around an object takes less distance than braking, and sudden braking can cause the driver to lose control of their vehicle. Also, do not use cruise control when driving on slippery roads.

Braking

Bridges, overpasses, shaded spots, and intersections are likely the first areas to become slick and icy during winter conditions. When approaching these areas, focus your attention as far ahead as possible, 20-30 seconds, to compensate for the longer stopping distances. Remember when road conditions change, so do stopping requirements. It takes twice the distance to stop on ice at 0°F than it does at 32°F.

If your vehicle has an antilock braking system (ABS), you do not need to pump the brakes on slippery roads. ABS has speed sensors on each wheel and uses an electro-hydraulic braking circuit. The system detects if a wheel begins to skid and pulses the brakes. In short, an ABS will pump the brake for you. Simply apply steady pressure to the brake. ABS is standard on vehicles manufactured after 2013.

If your vehicle does not have ABS, pumping the brakes can help you maintain control on slippery roads. Apply and release pressure to the brake at a moderate rate. Applying pressure to the brake too quickly can cause your vehicle to skid.

What This Means for Counties

Vehicle accidents are a major area of loss for the county pools. You can take steps to limit this loss by monitoring road and weather conditions when driving in winter conditions and making sure that both you and your vehicle are prepared. Drive at speeds appropriate for the road conditions and maintain a greater following distance on slick or icy roads. Stay safe. For more information about winter driving conditions, contact CTSI at 303 861 0507. 