



Safety Matters

Talking Points for Supervisors

Diversified Insurance Industries, Inc.

Winter Driving - Skids

Experienced drivers know the special hazards of winter driving, but should be reminded about the danger of skidding when conditions are slippery.

One of the most terrifying experiences of winter driving is to skid. If it happens at a high speed, the result could be a disastrous crash. That is why it is vital to slow down at the first sign that the road is slick. Most skids can be avoided by simply adjusting to driving conditions and knowing how to recover from a skid.

Skids are most likely to occur on curves and turns, so slow down ahead of time to prepare for them. Then, when in the curve, accelerate slowly and steer steadily with no abrupt change in direction and, especially, no abrupt braking. Driving smoothly in general can help prevent skids.

Plan ahead of time for lane changes; check your rearview mirror, your blind spots and signal your intentions to traffic behind you. Then, swing over in a long, gradual line. Make the move with the smallest possible steering change and with a light foot on the gas.

If you go into a skid, remember two critical rules: don't steer against the skid and avoid using the brakes. Instead, immediately take your foot off the accelerator and steer in the direction the vehicle is sliding until you feel recovery of traction, then slowly straighten the wheels and keep rolling. So, if the back of your car is fishtailing to the right, turn the wheel gently in that direction until your car recovers.

If braking is necessary before traction is recovered, apply the brake pedal cautiously so you do not lock the wheels and intensify the skid. You have better brake control in a skid situation if your vehicle is equipped with anti-lock brakes.

You should constantly be on the lookout for areas that might induce skidding, such as

unexpected ice patches or piles of wet leaves, which tend to be found in shady areas or on overpasses. Keep in mind that "wet" ice, warmed by the sun, is twice as treacherous as "cold" ice. Be especially alert whenever there is any kind of precipitation during cold weather (or has been recently).

Above all, the expert driver knows that a safe stop on icy or snow-packed roads is a tricky maneuver which requires skill and good judgment. First of all, anticipate stops. Slow down gradually, well ahead of intersections, to allow time to stop safely.

Since accidents are common in winter, you should also be extra cautious while driving. Drive on slippery roads at reduced speed and increase following distance behind the vehicle ahead. This gives an extra space cushion for safe stopping. In the winter, it is always best to be overly cautious and overly slow. Because winter driving can be so risky, it is also a good idea to practice driving in slippery conditions so you are well-prepared and comfortable.

When you drive into deep snow, you may find that stepping on the gas only causes the wheels to spin, with little if any forward movement. In such cases, avoid over-accelerating. A light foot on the gas pedal and a high gear is most effective.

Whenever you will be driving in winter weather, be sure your vehicle is properly equipped. Your brakes should be functioning correctly, and your tires should be properly inflated with a good tread surface. Sometimes snow tires, and even chains, may be best to help keep your vehicle under control during those blustery winter storms.

Expert drivers know that a safe stop on an icy or snow-packed road is a tricky maneuver which requires skill and good judgment.

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