Survive the Drive this Winter



Safety Talk

What's at Stake?

Don't think fate wouldn't leave you stranded in a vehicle during a snow storm. This happened to school bus driver Carl Miller in Colorado. In a desperate bid for survival, he set out into the storm, hoping to find a farmhouse. But he froze to death in a nearby field.

Preparing your vehicle for the winter season and knowing how to react if stranded or lost are the keys to safe winter driving.

How to Protect Yourself

Before embarking on a winter trip, have a mechanic check the following items

- Battery
- Antifreeze
- Wipers and windshield washer fluid
- Lights (including hazard lights)
- Exhaust system
- Heater
- Brakes
- Oil level and grade

Install good winter tires, and make sure they have adequate tread. Some jurisdictions even require that vehicles be equipped with chains or snow tires.

Other winter driving tips include:

- Keep a windshield scraper and small broom handy.
- Map out your trip carefully.
- Listen to the radio or call the state highway patrol for the latest road conditions.
- Travel during daylight, and try to take at least one other person with you.
- Dress warmly. Wear layers of loosefitting clothing.
- Store high-energy food and several bottles of water.

When driving in winter, keep these items in your car:

- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First aid kit with pocket knife
- Blankets
- Sleeping bags
- Matches
- Extra set of mittens, socks and wool cap
- Extra clothing
- Bag of sand for wheel traction
- Small shovel
- Booster cables
- Set of tire chains or traction mats
- Brightly colored cloth to use as a flag

If you become trapped in your vehicle during a blizzard, stay put. Do not leave the car to search for help unless help is visible nearby. Display a trouble sign or hang a brightly colored cloth on the radio antenna.

Turn on the car’s engine for about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. Beware of carbon monoxide poisoning by opening a window slightly and keeping the exhaust pipe clear of snow.

Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia. Do minor exercises to keep up circulation. Avoid overexertion, such as shoveling snow or pushing a vehicle. Cold weather puts added strain on the heart, and heavy physical activity could trigger a heart attack.

Final Word

Knowning the dangers of winter driving is impertive. Being prepared for the winter driving season can mean the difference between a safe trip and a fatal incident.