

Drive Safe in Winter Weather

There were 68 deaths on Northern Ireland's roads in 2016. Drive safe in winter weather.

Before you set off:

- Check weather in advance. Don't ignore warnings about closed roads or advice to avoid certain routes.
- Can travel be re-scheduled to avoid the worst of the weather? Not everyone can, but the more who are able to avoid travelling in bad weather; the better the journey is likely to be for those who have to.

Once you're on the move:

- Get your speed right when driving in snow. Too fast and you risk losing control, too slow and you risk losing momentum. Brake, steer, and accelerate as smoothly as possible.
- Start gently from stationary, avoiding high revs. If you get into a skid, remember to take your foot off the pedals and steer out of it, only using the brake if you cannot steer out of trouble.
- It's better to think ahead as you drive to keep moving, even if it is at walking pace.
- Double or triple your normal stopping distance from the vehicle in front. Drive so that you don't rely on your brakes to be able to stop on an icy surface, they simply may not do that for you!
- If your vehicle has ABS - in very slippery conditions it will not give you the same control it would in others. Traction control and other electronic systems (ESC) can really help, but they cannot overcome the laws of physics, so don't rely on them, use common sense.
- Plan your journey around busier roads as they are more likely to have been gritted. Avoid using short cuts or minor roads they are less likely to be cleared or treated with salt, especially country lanes.
- On motorways stay in the clearest lane when possible and stay away from slush and ice. Keep within the clear tyre tracks if you can.
- Stay in a higher gear for better control, and if it is slippery, move off in a higher gear, rather than first.
- Bends are a problem in slippery conditions, slow down before you get to the bend, so that by the time you turn the steering wheel you have already lost enough speed.
- On a downhill slope get your speed low before you start the descent, and do not let it build up, it is much easier to keep it low than to try and slow down once things get slippery.
- In falling snow use dipped headlights or fog lights to make yourself visible to others (especially pedestrians) but as conditions improve make sure your fog lights are only on if necessary as they can dazzle other drivers.



Once you're on the move, continued:

- If you are following another vehicle at night, using their lights to see ahead can cause you to drive dangerously close, keep well back from other traffic.
- Having windscreen wipers working for a lengthy time with snow falling can be mesmeric and quite a strain, be prepared to stop and give your eyes a rest, but choose the right place to do it!

Things to look out for:

- Trucks can have large amounts of snow or ice on top that will come off, be prepared for it to blow off on to your windscreen.
- Black ice forms in shaded spots and areas exposed to cold winds. Bridges are particularly prone to ice over first and thaw last.
- Approaches to junctions are usually more slippery, where the surface has been worn smooth by drivers braking and accelerating.
- Fresh snow can have frozen ice underneath it. If it has fallen on dry clear ground the fresh snow will have a little more grip than where it has been compacted by other traffic. If it has fallen on top of old snow be aware that you may actually be driving on wet ice.
- As snow or ice melt they can leave a very slippery layer - slush is slippery stuff!



Preparation:

- Always clear your windows, lights and mirrors. Don't forget that snow on the bonnet can blow onto your windscreen, so clear that off, and clear the roof to avoid snow being blown back onto traffic following you.
- Make sure you have an emergency kit so you are prepared in the event of a breakdown. On longer journeys always let someone know you have set off and tell them your planned route.
- Ensure your mobile is charged up so you can make a call in an emergency, but don't use it when driving!
- Do a proper winter check of your vehicle, looking at washer fluid, de-icer/scraper and tyre tread.
- If you leave the car engine running to help de-ice windows before you start the journey, make sure that there is someone with the car. A cold thief may see a warm opportunity, and some insurers may not pay out in those circumstances.

Emergencies:

- Keep track of where you are. If you need to call for assistance, you need to be able to tell the breakdown or emergency services your location, so they can find you.
- If you must leave your vehicle to telephone for assistance, find a safe place to stand away from the traffic flow. If you have just lost control the next driver could do so in the same place.
- On motorways and dual carriageways it is usually better to leave your vehicle and stand a short distance behind and to the safe side of it. Don't stand in front of it if at all possible. Balancing the risks of the car being crashed into and hypothermia is something that depends on your situation.

Winter Safety - Acceleration

Power and acceleration are useless without control. This is especially true when drivers are faced with cold, wet and slippery conditions. Here are six tips to ensure you remain in control:

1. Be aware of how your car applies power to the road. As acceleration shifts weight from the front to the back of the car, the wheels of front wheel-drive cars will spin more easily in wet and icy conditions.
2. Accelerate smoothly and maintain a safe speed, particularly in wintery conditions. Remember the speed is a limit, not a target; it may be too fast especially when conditions are poor.
3. Make sure you're in the correct gear before overtaking and use as much power as is safe bearing in mind your car's abilities, the speed limit, and the road conditions.
4. Changing your use of the accelerator is a good way of slowing down, without needing to touch the brake. When you can see traffic slowing up ahead, ease off power in advance instead of driving up behind and braking as you arrive.
5. When approaching bends, reduce your speed, but ensure you maintain a constant speed and a smooth line through the bend. As you drive out of the bend, you can increase power. If it's slippery, leave accelerating until you are straightened up properly.
6. On level ground or downhill you should be able to start from stationary without using the accelerator in a modern car just lift the clutch carefully, and then very gently apply power once you are moving. When the roads are icy, this can be a useful technique.

Wintery conditions don't necessarily mean you can't go out, but if weather conditions are very hazardous; do question whether you really need to make the journey. Understanding your cars acceleration and power will help you stay in control, whatever the weather.

