

Foul Weather Driving

Bad weather affects all roads. Our interstate system is a marvelous example of modern engineering, but no matter how good the road is, it is dangerous when there is sleet, snow, or ice on the roadway. Speed must be reduced on slippery roads.

When road conditions are slippery, drivers must look farther ahead so they can anticipate emergencies and avoid the need for sudden maneuvers. Most skids are caused by last-second stops and turns on slippery pavements.

Extra care must be taken on hills. Brake over the top of blind hills at a speed that will permit you to bring your vehicle to a stop in case the highway isn't clear ahead. On a downgrade, both loss of traction and gravity are working against you.

Don't attempt to drive around or through a scene where other vehicles have obviously had trouble with the road conditions. The same conditions that caused their trouble may still be there when you arrive. When there is no room to get through, you must be prepared to stop. During the winter months, snow- and ice-covered truck lots are prevalent. Good drivers will allow more clearance between their vehicles and fixed objects when maneuvering on bad surfaces. A pile of snow or an ice rut may throw vehicles off just enough to cause them to strike a stationary object if not enough clearance has been allowed.

Drivers of vehicles with air brakes must take care to protect their air supply in freezing weather. Brakeline freeze can be annoying and dangerous. Many newer trucks are equipped with synthetic air lines, so the old solution of melting the ice with a fuse or torch is no longer a quick solution. If the vehicle is not equipped with an air dryer or other means of automatically expelling water and other contaminants from air tanks, the driver must take the time to manually drain the air tanks every day.

The lighting systems of vehicles become especially important during the winter months. Nights are longer, and visibility is often reduced by bad weather. Electrical systems are winter-sensitive. Approximately 80 percent of all light bulb failure is due to environmental reasons. Drivers must inspect their lights more often during the winter and clean them when necessary so they can see and be seen by other highway users.

Foul weather driving is much more strenuous. Drivers need proper rest before every trip, and while enroute, fresh air helps keep drivers alert. An open window is an old safety practice, and it helps drivers hear what is going on around their vehicles.

After all precautions are taken and good practices are followed, there still will be occasions when conditions become too hazardous to proceed. Good drivers will pull off the road at the first safe place, notify their companies of the delay, and wait until conditions improve before continuing.