

SafeDriver Monthly Newsletter

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Driving in Winter Weather

As we enter the coldest part of the year, it's important to remember your winter driving techniques and to pass those driving rules on to your teen.

The best way to prevent losing control of your car in snow and ice is to plan for what you might do if you encounter problems while driving in winter conditions. First off, remember that speed limits are set for ideal conditions, which go out the window in winter. Then, consider what different types of winter driving problems you may encounter:

- **Limited visibility** – Limited visibility can be caused by fog, rain/sleet, or snow. Sometimes you can encounter a super-fog situation that is caused by a mixture of fog and snow. In limited visibility, you should slow down significantly and make sure you leave enough room between you and the vehicles ahead. If you are rear-ended, you don't want to be driven into the vehicle ahead.

Most multi-vehicle pile ups occur under low visibility conditions. If visibility is severely limited, the best thing to do is to get off the road and wait for conditions to improve

Remember also that snow dampens sound so you may not be able to hear a pileup ahead until it is too late. If you should be involved in a pileup, abandon your vehicle, and seek safety off the road before other vehicles crash into you.

When driving in snow or fog, don't use your high beams. High beams just reflect off the snow or fog and make it even harder to see.

Anticipate and watch out for pedestrians who may have their head down against the storm and may not see you.

- **Snow** – In snow you should slow way down to avoid skidding. When approaching red lights or stop signs, slow down early and gradually to prevent skidding into the

intersection. Again, leave plenty of room between you and the vehicle ahead. When your light turns green, gently apply the gas to prevent skidding.

- **Ice** – Ice is the most treacherous hazard in winter driving. Sometimes there can be a layer of ice beneath a layer of snow that makes steering and braking almost impossible. Understand that, when the snow melts, it can turn to ice overnight. The roads may not be as clear of hazards as they seem. An especially treacherous type of ice is black ice that remains invisible and you won't know it's there until you try to drive over it. Patches of black ice can remain in shaded areas of the road well into spring. When driving in ice, you should slow to a crawl.
- **Skidding** – If your vehicle starts to skid on snow and ice, remember your skid handling procedures. If your car starts to skid, take your foot off the gas and gently turn the wheel in the direction of the skid to counteract it. Make gentle steering changes until your vehicle is back under control.



Know the type of brake system you have. If you have standard brakes, resist the urge to slam on the brakes in a skid. Take your foot off the gas and gently pump the brakes until you regain control. If you have anti-skid brakes, you can apply full pressure to the brakes. You may feel a flutter in the brake pedal but don't be alarmed, that is the anti-skid-brake system doing the brake pumping for you. Remember that anti-skid brakes won't help you brake faster, in fact, due to the pumping nature of the brakes, it may take slightly longer for your vehicle to stop.

A major storm in Atlanta a few years ago consisted of several inches of snow over a layer of ice. With all the hills in the Atlanta area, driving under those conditions became impossible and many commuters abandoned their cars on the interstates and side roads and sought shelter in nearby buildings overnight. When you drive in the winter, always make sure you have warm clothing and even blankets available in case you have to abandon your vehicle for any reason. Also make sure you have a fully charged cell phone but don't depend on help from police and fire because they will already be stretched to the limits.

