

Preparing your vehicle for winter

Take the following measures to help ensure safety on the road this winter:

- Check tire pressure and tread depth. Use a pressure gauge to determine if tire tread is deep enough to ensure good traction. Consult your owner's manual for advice.
- Look for uneven wearing which can also be dangerous.
- Check battery, exhaust system, heater and defroster. Make sure the battery is not past its lifespan, and that the terminals are tight and free of corrosion. Hoses and belts should be inspected for cracks. Now is the time to discover if your heater is broken - not when the temperature drops.
- Check antifreeze. Make sure that a 50 percent antifreeze, 50 percent water mixture is at the proper radiator level. If the coolant is two years old, get it flushed and refilled.
- Change oil every 3,000-5,000 miles. Consider using a lighter, "winter weight" oil. Refer to your owner's manual for guidance.
- Check windshield wipers and blades: Replace the blades twice a year and make sure extra wiper fluid is on hand.
- Ensure the four-wheel drive system and brakes are functioning properly.
- It is a good idea to keep at least a half tank of gas in your car at all times during the winter months, to keep the fuel lines from freezing.



Items to include in your vehicle emergency kit

Even with the best maintenance and cautious driving, snow, ice and freezing temperatures can sometimes still get the best of your vehicle. Hazardous winter driving conditions induce many accidents, which is the leading cause of death during winter storms. Being prepared to handle potential slide-offs, accidents, and car trouble in winter is a simple but crucial step to take in preparing for the next few months.

Prepare a winter emergency kit for your vehicle. Supplies should include:

- At least two blankets or a sleeping bag
- Flashlight or battery-powered lantern and extra batteries
- Booster (jumper) cables
- Emergency flares
- Extra clothing, particularly boots, hats and mittens
- A steel shovel and rope to use as a lifeline

- Bottled water or juice and nonperishable high-energy foods (granola bars, raisins, nuts, peanut butter or cheese crackers)
- Thermos or container that won't allow liquids to freeze
- First-aid kit and necessary medications
- Sand or non-clumping cat litter for tire traction if your vehicle gets stuck in snow or ice
- A cell phone and charger which can be adapted to vehicle use
- Ice scraper and snow brush
- Tire repair kit and pump
- Candle, matches, heat sticks/packs, lighters, hand-warmers, etc. (Be sure to crack the window if you using a heat source inside the vehicle)
- Lock your vehicle, even in bad weather. If locks freeze, heat the key. Do not pour hot water on the locks – they will refreeze.

Safe winter driving techniques

Before leaving home:

- Find out about the driving conditions and pay attention to weather reports on the radio.
- Remove any snow on your vehicle's windows, lights, brake lights and signals.
- Check your vehicle's tires, wiper blades, fluids, lights, belts and hoses.
- Let someone know your destination, route and expected time of arrival.
- Become familiar with your vehicle's winter weather operating characteristics. Front-wheel-drive vehicles generally handle better than rear-wheel vehicles on slippery roads because the weight of the engine is on the drive wheels, improving traction.



On the road:

- Keep your gas tank at least half full. Fill the tank before you park for lengthy periods. This will help prevent fuel line freeze-up.
- If you need to turn on your wipers, you need to turn on your lights.
- Remember to drive well below the posted speed limit and leave plenty of room between cars.
- Be cautious of black ice. Roads that seem dry may actually be slippery and dangerous. Take it slow when approaching intersections, off-ramps, bridges or shady areas.
- Stay attentive and reduce speeds during times of limited visibility.

- Give snowplows room to work. The plows are wide and can cross the centerline or shoulder. Do not tailgate and try not to pass.
- Give yourself space, remember it takes your car extra time to stop on slick and snowy roads
- Understand your vehicles brakes and how they work. Brake early, brake slowly, brake correctly, and never “slam on the breaks.”
- When driving on ice and snow, do not use cruise control and avoid abrupt steering maneuvers.
- Take it slow when merging into traffic.
- Be aware of what is going on a head of you because actions by other vehicles will alert you to problems more quickly giving you that split-second of extra time to react safely.

What to do if you become stranded

If you are involved in an accident or slide-off, encounter vehicle trouble or become stuck in the snow it's important to stay calm and take a few precautions to help you stay safe and help rescuers find you.

- Remain calm. Chances for rescue are better if you remain calm and in your vehicle.
- Do not leave your car, it is the best protection you have.
- Run the engine for 10 minutes every hour to stay warm. An idling car only uses about one gallon of gas per hour.
- If you don't have a cell phone to call for help, tie a brightly colored cloth to the antenna for rescuers to see.
- Light a flare or turn on a flashlight to let others know you're stranded in the vehicle
- Keep the overhead light on when the engine is running so you can be seen (remember to keep the windows cracked).
- Keep the exhaust pipe free of blockage to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Use floor mats, seat covers and blankets for added warmth. If you must leave your vehicle during a severe snow storm or blizzard, secure a line of rope or cord to yourself and the vehicle to avoid becoming lost or disoriented.
- Keep bottled water in your vehicle emergency kit. Never eat snow. It will chill you and lower your body temperature.

