

Safe Winter Driving Habits

Why should drivers be focusing on their own winter driving habits?

The summer brings about bad driving habits that can become fatal if applied in adverse conditions. Hard and sudden braking, aggressive steering and a lack of space around the vehicle are all activities that can creep into a driver's routines, but in the winter a patch of ice or loose snow can make the difference between a risky manoeuvre and a collision – or worse, a fatality.

What can drivers do to keep themselves safer?

Take care and slow down. Steer gently into turns to avoid skids. Steer into the skid, toward the destination, if a skid does occur. Don't use cruise control on wet, snowy or icy pavement. It can reduce reaction times.

What can be done as a pre-emptive measure?

Ensure that you have a fully charged battery, a full reservoir of windshield washer fluid that's effective up to -40 degrees Celsius and an ice scraper. Keep an emergency survival kit containing essentials, including warm clothing, water, non-perishable food, candles, a book of matches or a lighter, a flashlight and jumper cables. And, of course, install winter tires.

What are the statistics on winter tire use in Canada?

According to a 2016 study done for the Tire and Rubber Association of Canada, winter tire use is on the rise throughout Canada. Excluding Quebec, where law mandates winter tire use, 61 per cent of Canadian drivers are now using winter tires. This includes 81 per cent in Atlantic Canada, 65 in Ontario, 55 per cent in Alberta, 50 per cent in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and 49 per cent in British Columbia.

Why aren't those who aren't using winter tires making the change?

According to the survey, 48 per cent of those who don't have winter tires believe that all-season tires provide enough traction, and another 23 per cent cited cost as the barrier.

Are these reasonable concerns?

All-season tires have been proven to not have the same level of grip and traction in extreme cold, as the rubber compound in the tire gets harder and loses grip when the temperature starts dipping below 7 degrees Celsius. As for the cost, all-season tires get worn down quicker than winter tires when driving in the snow and on ice. Cost savings are negligible over the lifespan of the tires.

What can commercial truck drivers do to stay safe?

Plan your route before departure. Know where the truck stops are along the way. Know how your brakes react to snow and ice, as a tractor-trailer's braking distance can be four to ten times longer on ice than on dry roads. Check your lights regularly for snow or ice buildup, and consider a fuel treatment to keep your diesel from gelling. Lastly, steer gently on curves. The risk of losing control or jackknifing is much higher with sudden movements.

For questions, call Lewis Smith, Communications and Media Program Coordinator at the Canada Safety Council 613-739-1535 x228