SAFETY CANADA

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COLD WEATHER, QUIET CONSEQUENCES

Winter has a way of narrowing our focus.As this newsletter reaches its 70th volume, it's a reminder that some patterns repeat themselves with remarkable consistency. As the days get shorter and routines tighten, attention shifts to the immediate and the necessary. Get the car started. Get the kids to school. Get through the workday. Get home. In that compression of time and energy, safety decisions don't disappear, but they often move into the background.

THOSE QUIET CONSEQUENCES SHOW UP LATER, OFTEN LONG AFTER THE MOMENT A DECISION IS MADE.

That's part of what makes winter such a challenging season from a safety perspective. The risks are well known. Ice. Snow. Cold. Darkness. We talk about them every year, and most Canadians can recite the advice by heart. And yet, injuries, collisions, and close calls remain stubbornly common.

One reason is that winter doesn't just change *conditions*, but also *how we perceive risk*. Cold weather tends to reward urgency. Standing still feels uncomfortable, so we hurry. Darkness makes distances feel shorter and speeds feel slower. Familiar routes create a sense of confidence that can override caution, especially when we've "done this drive a thousand times."

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PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE: IMPAIRED DRIVING HASN'T GONE AWAY

For decades, Canada has made real progress in reducing alcohol-related road deaths. Since the mid-1990s, fatalities involving a drinking driver have fallen by more than half.

That didn't happen by chance. It came from sustained public education, enforcement, cultural change, and a societal understanding that impaired driving just isn't acceptable.

But recent findings from a Traffic Injury Research Foundation poll suggest that some of that hard-won progress may need reinforcement.



Between 2021 and 2022, the number of Canadians killed in crashes involving a drinking driver increased by 14 per cent.

Self-reported behaviour points in the same direction, too: in 2025, nearly one in ten drivers admitted to driving when they believed they were over the legal limit. This is a notable jump from the year before.

On their own, these numbers might be dismissed as anomalies. Taken together, they point to a shift that's worth paying attention to.

What's changing isn't just behaviour, but perception. Not even three-quarters of Canadians say drinking and driving is a serious problem. That's the lowest level of concern recorded in 20 years.

When attitudes soften, so do boundaries — what once felt clearly off-limits can start to feel negotiable, especially in familiar social settings where people trust themselves, the circumstances, or the shortness of the drive home.

Context matters here. Among drivers who admitted to driving over the legal limit, many had been drinking in everyday environments: bars, gatherings with friends, family events. These aren't rare or reckless extremes, but ordinary moments where judgment slips and consequences don't feel immediate.

The good news is that risk can often be reduced through decisions made well before anyone picks up their keys. Planning ahead still works.

Deciding in advance who will drive, how people will get home, or whether leaving a car behind is the smarter option removes pressure from the moment itself.

Hosting with intention helps too: making non-alcoholic options visible, encouraging guests to stay longer, or normalizing the idea that not everyone needs to drive home.

None of this erases the progress Canada has made. But it reminds us that progress isn't permanent. It has to be reinforced, renewed, and re-earned, often through choices that feel small at the time.

Safety isn't a finish line. It's a commitment we keep making, again and again.

Make Safety a Priority!



Gareth Jones
President and CEO



Cold Weather, Quiet Consequences (Continued from page 1)

In winter, many safety failures don't start with dramatic mistakes. They start earlier, in quiet moments of judgment. Deciding not to clear ice or snow properly because we're late. Choosing footwear that looks fine for a short walk. Driving a little faster because traffic seems light.

Winter also has a way of normalizing workarounds. We adapt constantly, often creatively, sometimes carelessly. Space heaters fill in for cold rooms. Vehicles become storage spaces for boots, bags, and gear that interfere with visibility. Each adjustment makes sense in isolation. Together, they can quietly increase risk.

Another factor is predictability. Summer hazards often feel variable and surprising. Winter hazards feel expected, which can make them easier to underestimate. When danger feels familiar, it's tempting to treat it as manageable, even when conditions change rapidly.

None of this is about blaming individuals. Safety isn't a personal failing problem. It's a systems and habits problem. We make decisions based on the environments we're in, the pressures we feel, and the signals around us. Winter sends mixed signals. It tells us conditions are harder, but also routine.

That contradiction is where risk creeps in.

The encouraging part is that winter risk is often most effectively addressed before anyone steps outside. Decisions made early tend to hold up better than those made in the moment. Planning extra time. Adjusting expectations. Leaving margin for error instead of counting on everything going smoothly.

It also helps to pay attention to the small signals that suggest it's time to slow down. Increased fatigue. Reduced visibility. A sense of rushing. These aren't inconveniences to push through. They're information.

Winter safety doesn't require perfection. It requires awareness. Not just of snow and ice, but of how the season nudges behaviour in subtle ways. When we recognize that winter changes how we think, not just how we move, we're better positioned to make choices that keep ourselves and others safe.

The season will do what it always does. The question is whether we notice how it's shaping our decisions, and leave ourselves enough space to choose differently when it matters most.

SNOWMOBILE OPERATORS COURSE

The Snowmobile Operators Course is a 7 to 8 hour training program with curriculum based on field-tested techniques. Ride your sled with confidence —sign up for a course today!

https://canadasafetycouncil.org/snowmobile



Winter tires are one of the most effective road safety tools available to Canadian drivers. They're also one of the most misunderstood. Research and surveys consistently show that many drivers still rely on assumptions about winter driving that don't hold up once temperatures drop.

Below are some of the most common winter tire myths, and why they matter.

Myth 1: All-season tires are good enough for winter
All-season tires are designed to perform across a range of conditions, but not extreme ones. Once temperatures fall below about 7°C, the rubber compounds in winter tires remain flexible, allowing them to grip cold pavement, snow, and ice more effectively. All-season tires stiffen in colder temperatures, reducing traction.

Myth 2: You only need winter tires when there's snow on the ground
Much of the safety benefit of winter tires comes from improved performance on cold, dry, or lightly icy roads. Many winter collisions occur when roads appear clear but are cold, shaded, or slick.

Myth 3: All-wheel drive makes winter tires unnecessary
All-wheel drive can help a vehicle accelerate in slippery conditions, but it doesn't improve braking or cornering. Tires are the only point of contact between a vehicle and the road. Without adequate traction, AWD can create a false sense of confidence, encouraging higher speeds without improving the ability to stop or avoid hazards.

Myth 4: Switching only once the weather gets bad
Waiting for the first major snowfall often means waiting too long. Temperature matters more than snowfall. Cold pavement alone reduces grip, particularly during early morning and evening commutes. Installing winter tires before consistent cold weather arrives helps ensure they're already doing their job when conditions change suddenly.

Winter tires don't eliminate risk, but they significantly increase the margin for error. They improve stopping distance, control, and predictability at a time of year when conditions are already working against drivers.

In winter driving, traction isn't a luxury — it's the baseline.

Letting go of outdated assumptions about tires is one of the simplest ways to reduce risk, before the road demands proof that those assumptions were right.



YOUTH SAFETY

WINTER PLAY AND UNSEEN RISKS

Winter has always invited kids outside in different ways than other seasons. Snowbanks become forts, frozen puddles become skating rinks. Hills, trees, and open spaces turn into places for testing limits and passing time. For many families, winter play feels familiar, even nostalgic.

That familiarity can make risk harder to see.

Ice That Looks Safe Isn't

Unsupervised winter play often carries hazards that don't announce themselves clearly. Ice looks solid until it isn't. Snow hides obstacles, drop-offs, and moving water. Cold exposure builds gradually, especially when children are active and distracted. In many cases, the danger isn't a single dramatic moment, but a series of small misjudgments that add up.

Ice play is one of the most persistent examples. Ponds, drainage basins, retention pools, and partially frozen waterways can look safe, especially after a few cold days. In reality, ice thickness can vary widely across the same surface due to currents, snow cover, or temperature fluctuations. Children may not recognize these warning signs, and by the time ice gives way, self-rescue is difficult without training or equipment.

When Snow Becomes a Structure

Snow forts and tunnels pose another underestimated risk. Packed snow can feel solid while being structurally unstable, particularly during periods of thaw and refreeze. Collapses can happen suddenly, and even small structures can trap or injure children who are playing inside them. Because these structures are often built collaboratively and informally, responsibility for safety can become diffuse.

Cold Is a Slow Risk

Cold itself is an often-overlooked factor. Children are less likely to notice early signs of frostbite or hypothermia, especially when playing with friends. Wet clothing, wind, and reduced daylight can accelerate exposure risk. What starts as "just a little longer" can turn into numbness, impaired judgment, or difficulty getting home safely.

Setting Expectations Before the Snow Falls

Adults play a critical role in setting expectations before winter play begins. Talking openly about boundaries, checking conditions together, agreeing on check-in times, and making sure children understand where play is safe all help reduce risk without eliminating independence. So does recognizing when changing weather or fading daylight means it's time to wrap things up.

Winter play has always carried a mix of freedom and risk. Paying attention to how that balance shifts in colder months helps ensure that exploration stays memorable for the right reasons, and that children make it home safely.

YOUTH SAFETY TRAINING

Safety training for our youth remains important in building their confidence and life skills. We offer e-learning programs on youth safety topics including playing hockey, electrical safety and more!

Visit https://csc.vubiz.com/safe-kids for more.



WORKPLACE SAFETY

WINTER DRIVING AS A WORKPLACE HAZARD

Winter driving is often framed as a seasonal inconvenience, something Canadians are expected to manage on their own. But for many workers, driving isn't optional. It's part of the job. When that's the case, winter road conditions turn a familiar task into a workplace safety issue.

Delivery drivers, home care workers, tradespeople, sales staff, inspectors, and volunteers all rely on winter driving to do their work. Yet driving risks are frequently treated as separate from workplace safety, assumed to fall outside an employer's responsibility once someone leaves the building.

That gap matters most when conditions are at their worst.

Winter introduces challenges that **directly affect safety behind the wheel**. Reduced traction, longer stopping distances, and limited visibility increase the likelihood of collisions, even on familiar routes. When workers are expected to keep schedules moving despite deteriorating conditions, pressure can quietly replace judgment.

Routine can also work against safety. Repeated routes create confidence, but winter conditions rarely stay consistent. Roads that seem manageable in the morning can change quickly with snowfall, wind, or falling temperatures. When driving becomes automatic, early warning signs are easier to dismiss.

Vehicle readiness adds another layer of risk. Tires, windshield visibility, lighting, and load security matter more in winter. In some workplaces, employees use personal vehicles for work without clear guidance on winter preparedness or expectations around driving limits in severe conditions. That uncertainty can leave workers making safety decisions on the fly.

Fatigue is harder to ignore in winter as well. Shorter daylight hours and demanding schedules can affect alertness, particularly for those who spend long hours on the road. Combined with challenging conditions, fatigue reduces reaction time and increases the risk of mistakes.

Recognizing winter driving as a workplace hazard doesn't mean stopping work. It means planning for reality. Clear expectations, flexibility when conditions are unsafe, and policies that prioritize safety over speed all help reduce risk. So does reinforcing that delaying a trip or adjusting plans is sometimes the safest choice.

Looking Ahead

Education and awareness remain at the core of everything we do at the Canada Safety Council, which is why we're excited to share a number of program updates.

Programs including the Professional Driver Improvement Course and Defensive Driving Course have both seen significant updates to print and digital materials. Updates are ongoing on our flagship Gearing Up motorcycle training program. Meanwhile, our fully developed Paramedic Driver Enhancement Program, School Bus Driver Improvement Course, and W inter Service Driver Enhancement Program are being enriched with interactive online course materials, all in conjunction with the province of Ontario's *Skills Development Fund.*

Add in our usual slate of seasonal messaging, preparations for our annual campaigns, and the start of 2026 is setting up to be a busy time! As always, thank you for supporting our mission.

SAFETY CANADA



HOME & COMMUNITY SAFETY

HIDDEN HEAT HAZARDS

As temperatures drop, portable heaters often become a quick solution for cold rooms, drafty spaces, or rising energy costs. They're familiar, accessible, and easy to use. They can also introduce serious fire risk when used without care.

The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs identifies heating equipment as a leading cause of home fire deaths. In most cases, the cause isn't a dramatic malfunction. It's everyday use that slowly erodes safety margins.

The most common risk factors include:

- **Insufficient clearance.** Portable heaters need space on all sides. Clothing, furniture, bedding, and paper can ignite if placed too close. In busy homes, that safe distance can disappear quickly as items are moved or piled nearby.
- **Improper power use.** Many heaters draw significant electrical load. Plugging them into power bars or extension cords increases the risk of overheating and electrical failure. Heaters should be plugged directly into wall outlets and used one at a time per circuit
- **Unattended operation.** Heaters are often left running overnight or while people are distracted or out of the room. That's when small issues are most likely to go unnoticed, including heaters being knocked over or cords overheating.
- **Long-term reliance.** Portable heaters are designed as temporary solutions. Using them continuously as a primary heat source increases wear and raises the likelihood of failure, especially in older homes.

Reducing fire risk doesn't mean avoiding portable heaters entirely. It means using them deliberately: keeping clear space around them, turning them off when leaving a room, and treating them as short-term support rather than permanent fixtures.

Winter already puts added strain on homes. Making a few careful choices helps ensure added warmth without introducing the possibility of unnecessary risk factors.

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