

ROAD SAFETY ALERT

Winter is here - drive safely!

The end of Summer Time during the last week of October heralds the beginning of the most dangerous time of year on our roads. Previous Novembers in some jurisdictions have seen road collisions involving approximately 3,000 pedestrians, more than 1,000 of whom were children!

Added to this, recent news stories warning of changing weather patterns due to global warming mean we are facing some of the most uncertain weather patterns on record.

There is no doubt that bad weather and longer nights pose a danger - with about 50% of all reported road traffic collisions at night occurring in wet conditions.

Between 3 - 6 pm is also a dangerous time - when people are traveling home after a busy day at work and children are making their way home from school. During the summer up to a quarter of all collisions happen during these hours, but when the clocks go back, heavy traffic and rapidly deteriorating light increases this statistic to a third.

Now is therefore a good time to focus on staying safe on the road this winter - whether you are driving on work business or in your own time.

Before you Drive

Driving in winter weather - falling leaves, snow, ice, wet and cold - creates a great challenge for vehicles and drivers. Keeping yourself and your vehicle in good technical repair reduces your overall chances of any mishap or disaster while driving in winter weather.

To prepare your vehicle for winter driving give it a complete check-up - electrical system (battery, ignition and lights); brakes; tires; exhaust; wipers; fluids, radiator / antifreeze and heating / cooling system. Keep your gas tank near to full to ensure that you do not run out.

It is particularly important to check your tires are in good order, and have plenty of tread depth. Recent research has show that effective well maintained tires can have a major effect on stopping distances on wet and slippery roads. Weekly checks, or when refuelling, are recommended.

On the Road

Drive according to current road and weather conditions. Whenever driving conditions are less than ideal, it pays to be cautious. Make sure that all windows (front, side and rear) and mirrors are clear and that wipers and defrosters are in good working condition.



Drive slowly with low beam headlights on if visibility is poor, test your brakes frequently, leave a bigger gap and never tailgate. Posted speed limits are for ideal travel conditions. Driving at reduced speeds, in a lower gear and at a safe distance from the vehicle in front are the best precautionary measures against any misfortune while driving on slippery roads. Lengthen your following distance behind the vehicle ahead of you - stopping distances double on slippery roads.

WARNING: If your vehicle is fitted with ABS, don't let this give you a false sense of security - drive with due diligence at all times!

If the Worst Happens

If you get stranded, don't panic. Keep yourself safe, and follow the detailed procedures in your driver's handbook if you are in a work vehicle. In your own vehicle you should contact the appropriate emergency support organisation and follow their guidance.

Remember to make sure you and your vehicle are in top condition; plan your journeys and adapt your driving style to allow for the road and weather conditions.

In really extreme weather, prepare an emergency kit for your car. Include things that cater for the unexpected - what would you need if you found yourself stranded miles from help during a snow storm? Include things like warm clothing, boots, high-visibility jacket, gloves or mittens, flashlight with fresh batteries, blankets, and fresh first-aid supplies.

During bad weather let people know where you are going, your route of travel, and when you expect to arrive. Plan your driving and likely arrival time in advance. Never drive if fatigued or under the influence of alcohol. Allow for extra traveling time or even consider delaying a trip if the weather is inclement. Is an alternative method of travel possible? Listen to weather forecasts, and if weather and visibility are hazardous, ask yourself 'is this trip really necessary?'

