Chapter 9 - Safe Driving Tips for Special Driving Conditions

Night Driving

Driving at night is more difficult than driving during the day. Headlights do not let you see as far ahead as you can in daylight, and limit your view of the sides of the road. The glare of oncoming headlights makes seeing the road more difficult.

For driving at night, you should:

- Make sure your windows are clean.
- Turn your headlights on from ½ hour after sunset until ½ hour before sunrise.
- Make sure your headlights are clean and working well. Have them checked from time to time for correct aim.
- Use your high beams when there are no oncoming vehicles.
- Do not overdrive your headlights. Your headlights only let you see about 350 feet ahead. Be sure you are driving slow enough to stop or turn if needed.
- Use your low beams when you come within 500 feet (about one block) of an oncoming vehicle. Also use your low beams when following another vehicle within 300 feet.
- Slow down when nearing a curve if you are driving the maximum posted speed limit.
- Use the edgeline as a guide. If there is no edgeline, use the center line to guide you.
- Stay awake and alert. Do not drive if you feel tired.
- Watch carefully for highway signs, as they are harder to see at night.
- Watch carefully for people and vehicles stopped on the side of the road.

Headlight Use

You must use your headlights any time weather conditions require the use of your windshield wipers.

Winter Driving

In winter, clean all snow and ice off your windows, headlights, and taillights. Be sure your windshield wipers and defroster are working. No matter how far you are going to drive, never start driving until all snow and ice is off your windows.

Your vehicle should have tires that are rated for driving in snow. If you do not have tires that are rated for driving in snow, you should have chains ready to put on your tires during bad weather. But even if you have “snow” tires or chains, you cannot drive safely on snow or ice at normal speeds. If there is snow or ice on the road, slow down and do not use your vehicle’s cruise control system. When starting on snow or ice, start slowly and smoothly. If your tires start to spin, try clearing a path by driving backwards and forwards a few times. If that does not help, spread some abrasive material like salt, sand, or cat box litter around your wheels. NEVER let anyone stand in line with your wheels. Your wheels may throw up gravel or ice and cause an injury.

Once you have started, try to get the feel of the road. Gently brake while driving to see how slippery the road is and then adjust your speed for the road conditions.

It will take longer to stop your vehicle when driving on snow or ice. So be sure to leave a safe distance, about eight to ten seconds, between your vehicle and any vehicle ahead of you.

When you want to slow down or stop, apply the brakes gently and smoothly. Never slam on your brakes — this may cause you to skid. On very slippery surfaces, pump the brakes by gently pushing down and letting up on them several times. If your vehicle is equipped with an anti-lock brake system, refer to your owner's manual for proper braking techniques in special situations.

Remember that bridges and overpasses will freeze and become slippery before other parts of the road, and be aware that even on cleared roads a few ice patches may still exist.

If you have a four-wheel drive vehicle, **do not** use the four-wheel drive on ice. Four-wheel drive vehicles can easily overturn on ice. If you hit an icy patch in four-wheel drive, take your foot off the accelerator.

Remember, Ice and Snow. . . . Take it SLOW!

Wet Pavement

When it starts to rain, water mixes with the dust and oil on the road to form a slick, greasy film. Fallen leaves can also become slippery. The wet pavement may make it harder for you to stay on the road on curves. It will also take longer to stop your vehicle. So be sure to slow your speed and leave a safe distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. Do not use your vehicle's cruise control system on wet pavement. The cruise control system will continue to provide power to the tires if you lose traction and may cause you to lose control.

Hydroplaning

On wet pavement, your tires may ride on the water rather than the pavement. This is known as "hydroplaning" and it refers to loss of traction and control. Hydroplaning can happen at any speed over 35 mph. In a severe rainstorm, the tires can lose all contact with the road at 55 mph.

If you think your tires are hydroplaning, take your foot off the accelerator and slow down. Do not hit the brakes as this may cause you to skid.

To avoid hydroplaning:

- Have good tires with deep treads on your vehicle.
- Keep tires properly inflated.
- Slow down during rainstorms or when the pavement is wet.
- Do not use your vehicle's cruise control system.

Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS)

Four-wheel ABS is a safe, effective braking system when used properly. It offers an important safety advantage by preventing the wheels from locking during emergency braking situations. If your car is equipped with ABS, you should be aware that under hard braking you may feel a pulsing

in the brake pedal. Do keep your foot on the brake. Maintain a firm and continuous pressure on the brake while steering to enable the four-wheel ABS to work properly.

Remember, if your vehicle is equipped with anti-lock brakes don't:
- Pump your brakes,
- Forget to steer,
- Be alarmed by mechanical noises and/or slight pedal pulsations.

These conditions are normal and let you know the ABS is working.

Skidding

Handling a skid is the same for front-wheel and rear-wheel drive vehicles. Take your foot off the accelerator, but DO NOT hit the brakes.
- Gently turn your steering wheel in the direction that your rear wheels are sliding.
- Be careful not to brake or turn sharply. Hitting the brakes or jerking the steering wheel will only make the skid worse.

Steer Into The Skid

1. Before Skid **2. Rear Wheels Slide To Right** **3. Turn Front Wheels To Right** **4. Vehicle Straight Again**

Fog

It is very dangerous to drive in fog. If you must drive in fog, you should:
- Reduce your speed.
- Be alert and ready to stop.
- Keep your headlights on low beam. In fog, you will see less if your lights are on high beam.
- If the fog becomes so thick you cannot see, pull off the road and stop. Leave your lights and emergency flashers **on**.

Handling Vehicle Emergencies

The most important rule in any emergency is **do not panic**. If you stay calm, you will remember what you should do. If you have power steering or a locking steering wheel, never turn off the ignition key until you have come to a full stop.

Brake Failure: If your brake pedal suddenly sinks to the floor:
- Pump the brake pedal fast and hard several times. If that does not work...
- Use your emergency or parking brake, but use it gradually.
- Shift to a low gear and look for a place to slow to a stop.
- Make sure your vehicle is off the road.
- After the vehicle has stopped, call for help. Do not try to drive to a garage.

Tire Blowout: If you have a tire blowout, you may hear a loud “bang” then “thump, thump, thump.” The steering wheel may jerk, and you may lose control of your vehicle.

- Hold the steering wheel tightly.
- Take your foot off the accelerator, but do not hit the brakes.
- Let your vehicle slow to a stop completely off the road.
- Apply the brakes when the vehicle is almost stopped.
- Turn on your emergency flashers.
- Change the tire only if you can do so without placing yourself in danger.

Running Off the Pavement: If your wheels run off the paved edge of the road, the wheels may pull to the right:

- Hold the steering wheel tightly.
- Take your foot off the accelerator, but do not hit the brakes. Only apply gentle brake pressure, if necessary.
- When the vehicle has slowed and you have control of your vehicle, turn back onto the pavement if the lane is free of traffic.

Steering Failure: If your vehicle does not turn when you turn the wheel:

- Take your foot off the accelerator.
- Let your vehicle slow down by itself. Do not hit the brakes until your vehicle has almost stopped, or unless you have to.
- Turn on your emergency flashers.

Headlight Failure: If your vehicle’s headlights go out:

- Try the dimmer switch or headlight switch, that might turn them on again. If that does not work...
- Put the parking lights, emergency flashers, or turn signals on.
- Pull off the road, but leave the emergency flashers on.

Stuck Accelerator: If your accelerator becomes stuck, you should:

- Shift to neutral;
- Apply the brakes;
- Keep your eyes on the road;
- Look for a way out;
- Warn other drivers by honking and flashing your emergency lights;
- Try to drive the car safely off the road; and
- When you no longer need to change direction and have stopped, turn off the ignition. (Turning off the key locks the steering wheel of many vehicles.)

Blocked Vision: If your hood suddenly flies open, your windshield wipers fail, or something else blocks your vision:

- Roll down the window so you can look around whatever is blocking your view.
- Turn on your emergency flashers.
- Pull your vehicle off the road.

Vehicle Approaching Head-On In Your Lane:

- Slow down.
- Pull over to the right and sound your horn.
- DO NOT swing over into the left lane. The other driver may pull back over into that lane, too.

Stalling On Railroad Tracks:
If a train is approaching:
- Unfasten your seat belt, get out of your vehicle, and off the tracks.
- Run in the direction the train is coming from. (If you run in the direction the train is heading, you may be hit with debris when the train hits your vehicle.)

If there is no train in sight:
- Roll down your windows and listen for the train.
- Try to start the engine. If that fails...
- Put your vehicle in neutral and push it off the tracks.

12 and 15 Passenger Van Safety:
The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has determined that 12- and 15-passenger vans are inherently unstable when loaded to the level for which they are designed, carrying more than ten passengers. The NTSB recommends that all drivers of 12- and 15-passenger vans obtain specific training on the handling and operation of these types of vehicles. For more information regarding 12- and 15-passenger van safety, you may visit the NTSB's website at **http://www.ntsb.gov/Pages/default.aspx**.