

Safe Winter Driving

The tradeoff isn't worth the risk

Although New Hampshire has widely varying winter weather, there are driving habits that are appropriate throughout the season. Let's review some ideas to prevent winter accidents.

SPEED - Give yourself plenty of time to get where you're going. Posted speed limits are for dry conditions, but on icy roadways, half the speed limit may be suicide. Vary your driving speeds according to the road conditions.

VISION - No other factor is as important for safe driving. Place frost shields in critical view areas. Clear all windows of snow, ice, or condensation. Also, remove snow from the hood. This snow turns into a quick white-out, and it gets into the air intake and ices the inside of the windshield. Use garage time to wash windows inside and out to reduce the accumulated film. Wear sunglasses if sunlight is reflecting from snow.

LIGHTS - Even though you can see during twilight and daylight, drive with low-beam headlights (not parking lights). Periodically clean all lenses because dirty headlights can cut visibility by 50 percent or more. Don't forget the directional lights, taillights, and rotating lights.

TIRES - Be sure your tires have adequate tread. Extra weight over the rear wheels might improve traction a little, but it's at the expense of steering control and longer stopping distances. The tradeoff isn't worth the risk.

Lower tire pressures do not increase traction, and underinflated tires can seriously affect steering. Keep in mind that for every 10 degree F drop, the tire air pressure goes down about one psi. Remember, underinflated tires are the major cause of tire failure.

ICE - At +30 degrees F, ice is twice as slippery as at 0 degrees F. As temperatures plunge below 0, it becomes "dry", so the relatively warm times can be the trickiest.

Ice forms first and lasts longer on bridges and in the shade. If you hit an unexpected patch, don't try to brake, accelerate, or downshift. Let up on your accelerator and idle your vehicle through the slippery area. If you skid, quickly take your foot of the gas and brake, and steer into the direction of the skid. Hold the steering wheel firmly and don't turn sharply. Use a light touch to correct the swerve.

BRAKING - For front and rear wheel drive vehicles with disc or drum brakes, the National Safety Council recommends squeezing the brakes with a slow steady pressure. When you feel them starting to lock, ease off until the wheels are rolling, then squeeze again. Pumping the brakes is no longer considered the most effective technique. Be sure the brakes are adjusted and balanced to minimize skidding.

FOLLOWING DISTANCE - Maintain at least twice the normal following distance on snow or ice. Accident Review Boards report that rear-end collisions account for most of the winter accidents. If you are being followed too closely, maintain greater breaking distance for gradual stops. Brake slowly when entering turnarounds while plowing or sanding. During adverse weather conditions, motorists may use your vehicle as a pilot car. Be alert for this hazardous situation!

VENTILATION - Crack windows for flow-through ventilation, even at very low temperatures. Be sure that the fresh air intake is free of ice and snow.

TOWING - All employees should be out of both vehicles when hooking or unhooking chains or cables. Fingers have been crushed and amputated when unaware drivers have moved their vehicles before everything was ready.

DEAD BATTERIES - When jumping batteries, connect one cable to the (+) terminal of each battery. Then connect one end of the second cable to the (-) terminal of the booster battery and the other end to a nut or bolt on the dead vehicle's engine. Do NOT connect it to the (-) of the discharged battery; that's close to any possible hydrogen gas production and unnecessarily increases the chances of an explosion. Start the engine of the helper vehicle and let it run a few minutes, then start the disabled vehicle's engine. Remove cables in the exact REVERSE order.

Always wear eye protection, preferably chemical goggles, when jumping batteries, and avoid placing your head directly over either battery. Explosions do happen!

SAFETY BELTS - Wear them!

Experience is a hard teacher, and that's where these ideas came from. They should help you handle winter's driving challenge. Have a safe winter!

The above article came from the top winter driving experts in the country, *Alaska Transportation Technology Transfer*, Vol. 13, Fall 1989. ■

Storage Of Gas Cans

You may benefit from the advise of one of NHDOT's safety officers

Wayne Perrault, Safety Officer, suggests Supervisors to designate individuals in each shed to check for proper storage of gas cans each day. Pointing out the fact that winter maintenance produces many different tasks in one day for Maintenance crews.

A crew could be cutting wood and carrying gas cans in the truck. The same truck could be used later in the day or at night to plow snow and should not be carried in the truck body during this procedure.

When gas cans are removed from vehicles they must not be randomly placed on floors or counters where the potential for a welder's spark could ignite them, nor should they be left in truck bodies parked in sheds all night.

Heat will expand gas and the potential of an electric spark is present with salt corrosion acting on the vehicles wiring system. The Department has lost equipment due to this problem before. Perrault recommends all sheds have a designated area for the storing of these gas cans.

The above helpful safety tip was reprinted from *Transportation News*, November, 1989, a publication of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation. ■

