

Sheriff Offers Winter Driving Tips - Get Your Vehicle (and Head) In The Game!

by Bend Weekly News Sources

It NEVER fails! As winter arrives in Central Oregon, a higher-than-average number of motor vehicle accidents occur on our highways for a two or three week period. Daylight hours decrease, temperatures cool, frost appears and snow or freezing rain may start to fall.

Drivers, used to drier roads and warmer weather (both of which frequently lead to higher speeds) often find themselves losing control of their vehicles. Driving with a "summer mentality" on winter roads is an invitation for disaster. We change our wardrobe to adapt to colder weather; we must also change our driving mentality from "summer" to "winter".

Four- or all-wheel drive vehicles are very popular in Central Oregon, but drivers MUST remember that having such a system does not mean you should drive faster. Many times, these types of systems can actually give drivers a false sense of security. Remember that four-wheel drive does not mean four-wheel stop; a four-wheel drive vehicle will not stop any better in icy conditions.

In preparing for winter driving season, drivers should consider the following:

Make sure your brakes, windshield wipers, defroster, heater and exhaust system are in top condition.

Check your tires; make sure they are properly inflated and the tread is in good condition. Remember that studded snow tires DO NOT mean you're invincible.

Always carry chains; make sure they are the proper size for your tires and are in working order. Carry a flashlight and chain repair links. Chains must be installed on the drive wheels. Make sure you know if your vehicle is front or rear wheel drive.

Carry water, food, warm blankets and extra clothing in your vehicle, especially on longer trips. A lengthy delay or going off the road and getting stuck in a snow drift will make you glad you have them.

Allow enough time; trips can take longer during winter than other times of year, especially if you encounter storm conditions or icy roads. Get an early start and allow plenty of time to reach your destination. Let someone responsible know WHERE you're going, WHAT route you'll be taking, WHEN you expect to arrive and WHO to call if you don't.

Keep your windshield and windows clear. Don't just scrape a "porthole" in your windows! Take the time to clear the entire window, or wait long enough for your defroster to clear the ice off.

Make sure that snow and ice are not covering your headlights and tail lights. Drive with your lights ON for better visibility.

If you don't clear all the snow off the roof of your car, it will either slide off the roof and cover your

windshield as you're slowing down or fly off onto someone else's windshield, causing them to smash into you or lose control of their vehicle.

Be more observant; visibility is often limited in winter by weather conditions. Slow down and watch for other vehicles and for snow equipment. Even though snow removal vehicles have flashing lights, visibility may be so restricted during a storm that it is difficult to see the slow moving equipment. Never, EVER pass a snowplow on the right when they are plowing!

If your vehicle is equipped with anti-lock brakes (ABS) and you start to lose control, DO NOT pump your brakes. The right way is to "stomp and steer."

Do everything slowly and gently. Remember, in the snow, the tires are always just barely grabbing the road. Accelerate slowly and gently, turn slowly and gently, and brake slowly and gently. To do this, you have to anticipate turns and stops. That means what? Going slowly and leaving plenty of distance between you and other cars. Rapid movements lead to skids and loss of control.

Do not use your cruise control during winter driving conditions.

While drivers should ALWAYS devote full attention to their driving, it becomes paramount during winter driving season. Stay OFF the cell phone, don't fiddle with the radio and don't let your passengers distract you.

Needless to say, EVERYONE in the vehicle needs to wear their seatbelts.

DO NOT call 911 to inquire about road conditions! Either call beforehand, or pull over and dial 511 to get the latest road and weather conditions.

While these suggestions may seem fairly simplistic, hundreds of accidents occur every year because drivers failed to follow one or more of them. Don't let yourself become a statistic! Every time you get in a vehicle, engage your brain before you put it in drive!

This information is provided as a courtesy by the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office.