

# Driving on Roads in Winter

Your guide to safer driving  
in bad weather



GRITTING  
IN PROGRESS

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This guide has been written to help you stay safe on the roads this winter. It includes advice from the Highways Agency and the \*Met Office and is supported by the Driving Standards Agency, the THINK! Campaign and the Institute of Advanced Motorists.



\* Met Office and the Met Office logo are registered trademarks

## STAY SAFE ON THE ROADS THIS WINTER

- \* Always check your route and the weather forecast before you leave, and listen to travel bulletins while you are on the road.
- \* If the weather is very bad, don't drive unless your journey is essential. Wait until the weather improves.



## BRITISH WEATHER AND OUR ROADS

In the UK, we experience a wide range of weather conditions. All too often we talk about the unpredictable nature of what the elements can throw at us.

On the roads, a sudden change in the weather can make for dangerous driving conditions like slippery surfaces or reduced visibility. Driving in winter weather can be especially hazardous.



**Kirsty McCabe,**  
*\*BBC Weather  
Presenter*

So check the forecast before you set out, and keep checking the travel and weather bulletins while you drive. During severe weather, the best advice is to stay off the roads. If you have to travel, make sure you are well prepared and know what to do.

***This guide will help.***

\* With thanks to the BBC for the use of the photo

## YOUR WINTER CHECKLIST

**Every year, people get caught out by winter weather. Don't leave it to chance. It is always better, and cheaper, to stop problems before they happen. A few simple checks now could make all the difference. So make sure you and your vehicle are prepared before severe weather arrives.**

- \* **Service:** Book your car in for a service and keep it well maintained throughout the winter.
- \* **Anti-freeze:** Use anti-freeze in the radiator of your car and winter additive in the windscreen wash reservoirs to stop them freezing when temperatures drop.
- \* **Windscreen and mirrors:** Windows and mirrors quickly get dirty in winter and it can be difficult to see when the glare of the low winter sun hits a dirty windscreen. Keep them clean.
- \* **Battery:** Keep your battery fully charged. Replace it if it is unreliable.
- \* **Lights:** Keep lights clean, and check the bulbs regularly.
- \* **Tyres:** You rely on your tyres to grip the road, so check them for wear and replace if necessary. Tyres should be inflated to the correct pressure and have plenty of tread depth.
- \* **Wipers:** Change the blades on your windscreen wipers if they are worn.
- \* **Emergency kit:** Put together an 'emergency kit' for journeys in severe winter weather, and keep it in the back of your car. See page 5 for details.

## TAKE A WINTER EMERGENCY KIT

Bad weather, accidents, vehicle breakdowns - you never know what might be around the next corner.

So it makes sense to keep a basic emergency kit in your boot.

**Here's what we recommend:**

\* **Ice scraper and de-icer**



\* **Torch**



\* **Warm clothes and a blanket**



\* **A pair of boots**



\* **First-aid kit**



\* **Battery jump leads**



\* **Shovel** in case you get stuck in the snow

\* Take **food and a warm drink** in a flask when you are travelling in wintry weather



## WINTER ON ENGLAND'S MAJOR ROADS

**The Highways Agency is responsible for England's motorways and major A roads.**

In winter, we have a well planned winter operation that swings into action to treat and remove ice and snow from these major routes. On other roads the responsibility for winter treatment lies with the local highways authority.

The winter service is activated whenever freezing temperatures are forecast. The motorways and major A roads are treated with salt (or exceptionally with other treatment agents) to prevent moisture on the road surface turning to ice.

When snow falls, snow ploughs and snow blowers are sent out to clear the roads. There are around 500 salt spreaders and snowblowers on stand-by. In severe weather the service is capable of working round the clock.



## HELP US TO KEEP OUR WORKERS SAFE

Our maintenance crews and traffic officers are out in all weathers, day and night, helping to keep the road safe for you and your family. Bad weather and fast traffic can make it dangerous work.

**So please, watch out for workers and their vehicles. Give them the space to do their job.**



## TAKE CARE AROUND WINTER SERVICE VEHICLES

### **Salt Spreaders (Gritters)**

- \* If you see a salt spreader ahead, slow down. It will be driving at less than 40mph while it is spreading salt, even on the motorway. If the amber beacons are flashing, it usually means the vehicle is spreading salt.
- \* Stay well back because salt is thrown across the width of the road.
- \* If you are riding a motorbike, take more care because your wheels could lose grip on freshly laid salt.
- \* Don't overtake a salt spreader unless it is safe to do so. Any driving close to winter service vehicles is at your own risk.

## Snow Ploughs

- \* Do not overtake a snow plough unless the lane you intend to use has been cleared.
- \* If you are following a snow plough, keep well back. The plough blade can throw up large amounts of snow on either side. If the amber beacons are flashing, it means the vehicle is likely to be clearing snow.

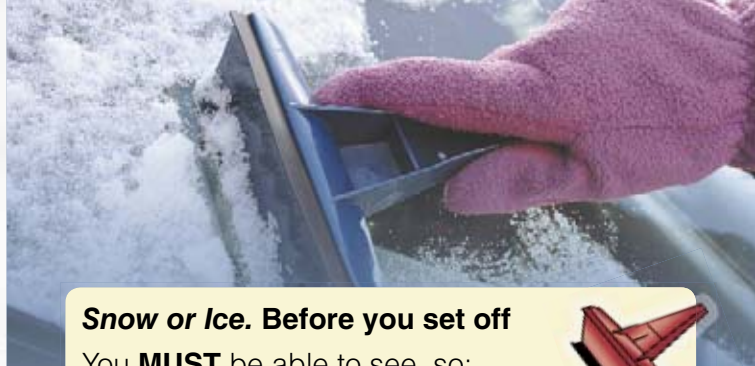
In the worst of the weather, we cannot guarantee that roads will stay open, but we can assure you that everything that can be done will be done to keep routes safe and open.

### CHANGE THE WAY YOU DRIVE TO FIT THE WEATHER

**Inside your vehicle, it may be warm and comfortable, but don't forget the weather outside! Freezing temperatures, sleet and snow, fog, heavy rain, even winter sun, can make roads dangerous.**

**Change the way you drive to fit the weather.** Remember

- \* Always check your route and the weather forecast before you leave.
- \* Listen to travel bulletins and take note of electronic message signs while you are on the road.
- \* Take a winter emergency kit.
- \* In bad weather, don't drive unless your journey is essential. Wait until the weather improves.



### Snow or Ice. Before you set off

You **MUST** be able to see, so:



- \* Clear all the ice and snow from your windows. Remove snow from the roof, boot and bonnet so it doesn't fall into the path of other road users when you move off.
- \* Make sure windows are de-misted and your mirrors are clean.
- \* Are your lights clean, and number plates clearly visible and legible?

### WHILE DRIVING:

- \* Drive with care at all times, even if the roads have been treated.
- \* Be prepared for road conditions to change suddenly over short distances.
- \* Avoid sudden braking, sharp turns, or sudden speed increases, which could all make your vehicle skid.
- \* The best way to slow without skidding is to get into a lower gear earlier, let your speed go down, and brake gently. If you do start to skid, take your foot off the accelerator. **Do not brake suddenly.**
- \* When moving off on a slippery surface, use the highest gear that you can (for example, second gear rather than first). This will help avoid wheel spin that could make you lose control of your vehicle.

## STOPPING DISTANCES IN WINTER

*In winter conditions, it takes longer to stop*

- \* When roads are slippery it will take longer to stop. Up to 10 times longer.
- \* So, drop your speed, and give yourself more time to slow down and stop.
- \* Drive with care even if roads have been treated.



**Dry road**

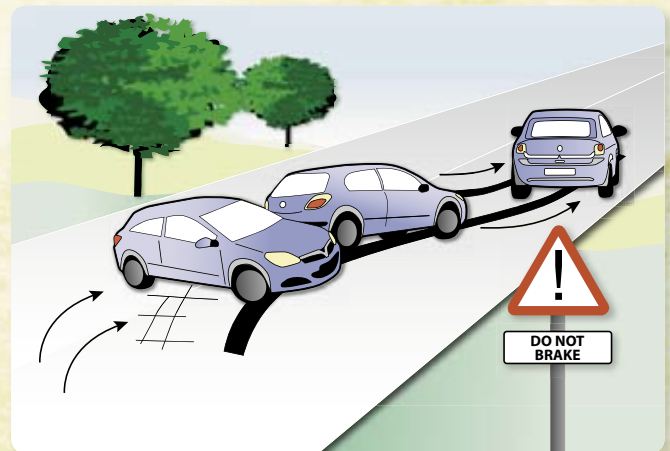
**Slippery road**

## IF YOUR CAR BEGINS TO SKID

*Do the right thing in an emergency!*

If your car starts to skid:

- \* Put your foot on the clutch. **Do not brake!**
- \* Steer immediately in the direction of the skid.
- \* When the car straightens, steer along the road.



**If your car starts to skid**

*Courtesy of the Finnish Road Administration and Liikenneturva  
Central Organization for Traffic Safety in Finland*



## HAZARDS FOR DRIVERS

### **Black ice and freezing rain**

Rain falling on to a cold surface can freeze instantly, causing black ice. Black ice and freezing rain are serious hazards because the road ahead may just look wet, but in fact be covered in sheet ice. Listen to the weather forecast for warnings of freezing rain.

Listen for road noise as you drive. Tyres make virtually no noise when travelling on ice. If you are worried, you can check your grip on the road by choosing a safe place to brake gently. If the steering feels unresponsive, this may indicate ice.



### **Fog**

- \* Slow down and use dipped headlights so other drivers can see you.
- \* Use fog lights if visibility is seriously reduced. Don't forget to switch your fog lights off again when the fog clears. Fog lights can dazzle the driver behind.
- \* Don't follow the rear lights of a vehicle in front. It gives you a false sense of security. If you get too close, you may not have time to brake and stop safely.
- \* Fog is often patchy. So don't think its 'all clear' and speed up as visibility improves. You could suddenly find yourself back in thick fog.



### **Rain**

- \* On wet roads, it can take up to twice as long to stop as it does on dry roads. Reduce your speed when it starts raining.
- \* If there is lots of spray, slow down and keep well back from other vehicles. You will have a better view of the traffic and more time to react.
- \* Beware of your tyres losing their grip on a wet surface. Your vehicle could 'aquaplane' on surface water. If this happens, take your foot off the accelerator and slow down. Don't brake suddenly.

## Floods

- \* Don't drive through lying surface water if you can avoid it. Slow right down so you can see what is ahead of you.
- \* Don't try to drive through deep water. The deepest water is usually near the kerb.
- \* If you have to drive through a flood: use first gear; move forward slowly to avoid stalling the engine. Keep the engine revs high and slip the clutch when you need to.
- \* Test your brakes after crossing water. Only drive on at your usual speed if the brakes are working and it is safe to do so.

## Winter Sun

- \* Glare from low winter sun can make driving dangerous, especially in the mornings and evenings.
- \* Keep your windscreen and mirrors clean to avoid making it even harder to see.
- \* Wear sunglasses if they help.



## IF YOU GET INTO TROUBLE

- \* Do not use a mobile phone if you are driving. Stop somewhere safe, or ask a person with you to make the call.
- \* On a motorway, use the emergency telephones by the side of the road rather than a mobile. This will help traffic officers and the emergency services to know exactly where you are. If you have to use a mobile phone, check where you are by looking at the markers on the posts at the side of the road.
- \* Get out of your vehicle and stand clear but close until help comes. If you leave your vehicle, it might get in the way of snow ploughs, ambulances and other emergency services.
- \* Put on your warmest clothes and keep having drinks. But do not drink alcohol, as this will make your body colder.
- \* If you have to leave your vehicle to get help make sure other drivers can see you and tell other people where you are going.



# Further Information

For real-time traffic information:

**08700 660 115**

**[www.highways.gov.uk/trafficinfo](http://www.highways.gov.uk/trafficinfo)**

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

(Calls from BT landlines to 0870 numbers will cost no more than 8p per minute; mobile calls usually cost more.)

For general Highways Agency information:

**08457 50 40 30**

email: **[ha\\_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk)**

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

(Calls from BT landlines to 0845 numbers will cost no more than 3p per minute; mobile calls usually cost more.)

Useful websites:

**[www.highways.gov.uk](http://www.highways.gov.uk)**

**[www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)**

**[www.iam.org.uk](http://www.iam.org.uk)**

## Safe driving at roadworks



**During 2005, five workers were killed and 12 seriously injured in the course of their work on Highways Agency roads. This was the worst year since 1999.**

For the safety of all road users and roadworkers, drivers approaching roadworks are advised to:

- Keep within the speed limit – it is there for your safety.
- Get into the correct lane in good time – don't keep switching.
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not the roadworks.
- Be alert for works' traffic leaving or entering roadworks.
- Keep a safe distance – there could be queues in front.
- Observe all signs – they are there to help you.

***Remember that tiredness can kill. Take regular breaks from driving.***

Further copies of this leaflet are available from  
Highways Agency Publications.

Tel: **0870 1226 236** Please quote this HA Publications Code: PR198/06