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Safety measures for winter drivers

Winter weather causes many people to retreat indoors until the spring thaw. However, for those who embrace the cooler temperatures or find that life must go on despite snow and ice, taking inventory of their vehicles is a must before the first snowflakes start to fall.

Tire care is an especially important area of vehicle maintenance. The tire experts at Michelin say that regular tires may be ineffective for winter driving. Summer tires are made from materials that are optimized for warm conditions. When the mercury drops, these same materials can harden, reducing their ability to grip the road. That lack of traction can be compounded by the presence of snow or ice. Even all-season tires, which are designed to be driven year-round, can be insufficient in severe weather conditions. Winter tires can help drivers safely navigate winter roadways.

Bridgestone Tires says that having the right snow tires matters when driving in winter weather conditions. It’s important to look for tires that can disperse water sufficiently and also grip the road. Snow tires are designed to remain softer and more flexible to conform to the road better in cold conditions. Some winter tires are even studded to provide better traction.

Unfortunately, even the best winter tires cannot provide perfect traction on slippery roadways. That is why it is essential — in conjunction with the use of winter tires or snow chains — to modify driving techniques to navigate safely.

• Drive slowly. Slow down on winter roads. Allow a greater distance for stopping than for dry conditions. Slippery conditions can make it more challenging to stop, and excessive speeds can make the situation worse.
• Shift into low gear. On hills, rely on low gears to maximize traction to travel up and down hills. This can minimize skids or sliding.
• Get the vehicle a tuneup. In addition to tires, be sure the braking system, battery and other major components of the vehicle are in good working order.
• Replace windshield wipers. Reduced visibility can compromise the safety of drivers and their passengers. Replace windshield wiper blades before winter arrives. Consider purchasing winter-rated windshield blades.
• Know how to recover from a skid. When skids occur on black ice or slush, drivers should take their feet off of the pedals and steer gently in the direction they want to go. As the vehicle regains traction, only then should the brakes or accelerator be applied.

Winter weather requires making some vehicle modifications, and drivers may want to alter the way they drive to be more safe on the road.
Create a vehicle preparedness kit

Breaking down while driving can be unnerving, potentially delaying trips and stranding motorists and their passengers for lengthy periods of time. However, for those with well-equipped emergency preparedness kits in their vehicles’ trunks, breakdowns can be much easier to manage.

Even though new vehicles are loaded with advanced technology, drivers are no less likely to avoid breakdowns. In fact, roadside calls for stranded vehicles are on the rise. A study by the American Automobile Association found that, in 2015, 32 million drivers required the organization’s services, with issues regarding vehicle batteries, flat tires and vehicle keys reaching all-time highs. Despite early warning systems, more than half a million drivers in the United States ran out of gas last year, necessitating service calls.

An emergency vehicle kit is something that no driver should leave home without. Just because a car appears to be in good shape or is well-maintained doesn’t mean something can’t happen. Here’s what to stock in an emergency preparedness kit for a vehicle.

- **Sustenance:** It’s impossible to determine how long you may be stranded if your vehicle breaks down. Therefore, keep some high-calorie energy or protein bars, or other portable foods with a long shelf lives, in your vehicle at all times.
- **Water:** Popular Mechanics says a person needs roughly a gallon per day to stay hydrated. If that’s too much to pack, bring empty water bottles and purification tablets. Otherwise, stock up on bottled water.
- **Weather supplies:** You never know which way the weather will turn. A blanket, poncho, tarp, trash bags, and much more can be used to keep covered, warm and dry.
- **Mobile phone:** Mobile phones can be used to call for roadside assistance or other help. But keep in mind that cell signals may be especially weak in remote areas.
- **Reflective triangles:** These items will warn oncoming traffic that your vehicle is on the side of the road.
- **Waterproof flashlight:** A flashlight is handy for making repairs at night or signalling traffic.

In addition to these supplies, a multi-tool, batteries, first-aid kit, rags, ropes, and duct tape are handy to have around. Preparedness kits can keep drivers safe and get them back on the road faster.
Did you know? Traffic can be bad

Traffic can be bad for your health and also bad for your car. According to a University of Surrey study published in Science Daily, pollution levels inside of cars were found to be 40 percent higher while sitting in traffic jams or at red lights compared to levels in free-flowing traffic.

The World Health Organization considers interior car pollution one of the top 10 health risks faced by humans. Health implications are not the only hazard posed by traffic jams. Stop-and-go traffic also takes its toll on vehicles. When idling, engine ventilation systems are at their weakest, warns Road and Travel. As a result, acidic combustion products and incompletely burned fuel in the engine can start to form engine deposits.

Over time, such deposits may clog fuel injectors and interfere with the flow of fuel to the combustion chamber. Traffic can age vehicle engines and their braking systems. Using brake fluid and oils for extreme driving conditions may help prevent some damage. Avoiding rush hour is another way to improve personal health and safeguard the condition of the vehicle.
If you are in the market for a new car, consider one with advanced safety systems. Here are just a few safety features that are helping drivers avoid and mitigate collisions.

**Backup Cameras**
Almost a standard feature now, backup cameras are attached to the rear of a vehicle to aid in backing up, helping eliminate the rear blind spot. Many of these cameras are also now equipped with sensors to alert you if you are getting too close to hitting a curb or other object.

**Lane Departure Warnings**
These warning features alert drivers when they are crossing marked lanes through visual, audible or vibration warning. Another great feature of these systems is that they require drivers to use their turn signal if they are leaving a lane intentionally — a benefit to everyone else on the road.

This technology is still evolving. If driving lanes are covered or faded, or there is inclement weather, these systems can be less reliable. Remember that there is no replacement for awareness on the roads.

**Automatic Emergency Braking**
This feature does just what it implies: Brakes are automatically applied by the safety system to prevent collision or reduce speed when it becomes reckless. Most systems alert the driver first of an impending crash.

If the driver does not respond quickly enough, or in an appropriate manner, the car’s safety system will engage to prevent or reduce the severity of a crash.

**Adaptive Cruise Control**
Adaptive cruise control takes “cruising” to the next level. Not only can you set your speed, but it uses a combination of lasers, radar and cameras to keep a constant distance between your vehicle and the one ahead of you.

Additionally, if traffic slows, some systems will automatically slow the car down — even to a complete stop in stand-still traffic — and bring it back up to speed when traffic resumes.
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Signs rotors may need to be replaced for smooth braking

The braking system of most vehicles consists of brake pads, calipers and metal discs called rotors that work to slow down a vehicle. When the vehicle needs to stop, the calipers squeeze the brake pads against the spinning rotors. Because a lot of friction is generated, rotors, like brake pads, need to be replaced periodically. However, drivers may not know when these components need to be changed or if other services can be done to prolong the life of the rotors a little longer.

The first step is to inspect the braking system. A healthy brake rotor will be smooth and have an uninterrupted surface that is free of dust, grooves and grit, advises automotive retailer CarsDirect. If brake pads have caused grooves to form, the pads or the rotors may need to be replaced.

Another tactic is to listen for brake noise when driving. Mechanics state that noise is commonly associated with bad brake rotors. If the rotors produce squealing or squeaking noises or even scraping noises while braking, they may need to be replaced.

Warped rotors also may produce vibrations that can be felt when the brakes are applied. A pulsing or rough feeling can vibrate through the entire chassis, says YourMechanic, a vehicle repair and advice website.

Speak with a qualified mechanic to see if a lathe can be used to shave off a little of the rotors and get a few more miles out of them. Otherwise, to ensure safe, adequate braking, rotors will need to be replaced anywhere from 30,000 to 70,000 miles depending on the type of brake pads and motorists’ driving style.
Tire maintenance a key component of spring check-up

When warm weather arrives, many people enjoy a collective sigh of relief. Just as people welcome the end of the cold, snow and ice, cars and trucks also can benefit from more moderate temperatures.

Salt, grime and pot holes can take a toll on tires over the course of a typical winter. Drivers will not get far this spring and summer without tires in good repair, which is why tire maintenance should be part of any seasonal repair checklist.

Inflation levels
Now is the time to use a tire pressure gauge to see if tires are at the ideal inflation levels. Many tires indicate the recommended PSI (pounds per square inch) on their sidewalls. Cold temperatures may cause tires to deflate a little. Esurance states that winter weather can cause tire pressure reduction at about one PSI for every 10 degrees the temperature drops. Driving on improperly inflated tires can be dangerous, potentially affecting handling and braking distances.

Check tires when they are cold for the most accurate reading. Properly inflated tires also will improve fuel economy, so drivers may even save a little money by inflating their tires.

Tire rotation/realignment
Examine the tires for tread wear. Any uneven or abnormal tread wear could indicate that the tires need to be rotated and the wheels realigned at the very least. Take the vehicle to a qualified mechanic to get their opinion on how to remedy the situation. Mechanics may recommend rotating tires every 6,000 to 8,000 miles, or about every six months for the average driver.

Wheel realignment may be necessary after a season of driving over potholes and other irregularities in the road. Misaligned wheels can cause handling problems, like the car “pulling” to one side.

Tire replacement
Drivers may discover extreme tread wear, bulges or even cracks in the sidewall during a tire inspection. These signs indicate that it’s time to replace the tires. Failing to replace old, worn down tires can increase the risk of automobile accidents.

Thorough cleaning
Once tires are inspected and possibly serviced or replaced, treat the car or truck to a washing and thorough detailing. This will help tires shine and get the vehicle road-ready for spring trips.
Light the way for safer nighttime driving

Routine vehicle maintenance protects drivers on the road while also protecting the often considerable financial investment they make in their cars and trucks. Maintenance guidelines have changed thanks to technology, but drivers must continue to care for their vehicles to ensure the safety of themselves, their passengers and fellow motorists.

From the time they first get behind the wheel, many drivers recognize the need to periodically change their oil and have their tires rotated. But few drivers may understand the importance of maintaining their vehicles’ headlights, and just how compromised they and their passengers might be when driving with old, dimming or foggy headlamps.

Burned out lights greatly diminish driver visibility and may even draw the attention of law enforcement. But headlight bulbs don’t just burn out overnight. As bulbs age, their light output gradually reduces due to use and factors such as humidity, electrical resistance and filament fatigue. Drivers concerned about the efficacy of their headlight bulbs can take steps to improve their visibility when driving at night.

- Accept your own vulnerability. The human eye is not adapted for nocturnal vision. As a result, drivers’ visual acuity may be reduced by as much as 70 percent when driving at night. Cloudy, dim headlights only exacerbate that problem, further compromising the safety of everyone on the road. Avoid aggressive driving and always obey the speed limits, even when it’s late at night and roads are empty.
- Learn to recognize headlamp clouding. According to the automotive lighting innovator Lumileds, sunlight, ozone, road pollution, and even chemicals used in car washes can contribute to headlamp clouding. Clouded headlamps often appear hazed and yellow and reduce headlight output considerably. Routine headlamp inspection can help drivers discover clouded lamps that can greatly compromise nighttime visibility.
- Restore clouded headlamps. Clouded headlamps do not necessarily need to be replaced. The Philips Headlight Restoration Kit can help drivers restore their clouded headlamp lenses. The kit employs a protective UV coating that effectively restores yellow, hazy lenses that have been compromised by years of exposure to the elements.
- Replace headlamps that are past their prime. While not all clouded headlamps need to be replaced, some aging or outdated bulbs are best replaced with new models designed to produce substantially more light output. Drivers whose vehicles are equipped with standard halogen headlights may be surprised to learn that such lights typically begin to break down within two to three years of installation, during which time light output might be reduced by as much as 30 percent. Compared to standard halogen bulbs, Philips X-tremeVision Bulbs can put substantially more light on the road while producing longer beam patterns that make it easier for drivers to see more of what’s ahead of them at night.

Drivers’ visibility is dramatically reduced once the sun goes down, but maintaining headlamps can help drivers combat that loss of vision. More information about headlamp maintenance and the alternatives to traditional halogen headlights is available at www.philips.com/automotive.
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