



How to stay safe on winter roads

Snowy weather can be a time for fun, especially for avid skiers or children who relish spending days off from school tossing snowballs and building snow forts. Many adults, however, do not look forward to the snow as much as youngsters do. Snow can be hazardous when driving, but putting snow tires on a vehicle can improve vehicle safety.

According to information from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, roughly 115 people die every day in vehicle crashes in the United States. Each winter, snowfall compounds treacherous road conditions, increasing the risk of accidents.

It is important to know how to drive when weather conditions are dangerous. It is also wise to outfit a vehicle to reduce its risk of slipping and sliding on icy, snowy roads. Here are some tips to follow.

* Limit time spent driving in the snow. Avoid driving during snowstorms or directly after whenever possible. Snow not only makes roads slick, but falling flakes can impair a driver's visibility and reduce his or her response time. Try to wait until snow-clearing teams have salted, plowed and sanded roads before venturing out.

* Be sure you can see clearly. Clear off the snow from the windshield, side mirrors and windows so it does not compromise your view. Also, top off the windshield fluid so you will be able to clear snow and salt kick-up from your windshield.

Look for a washer fluid that has an antifreeze component, otherwise, your washer jets and wiper blades could be rendered useless.

* Drive slowly. Reduce your speed when driving in inclement weather. It can be more difficult to stop or maneuver around a potential obstacle when conditions are less than ideal. Traveling at a high speed will increase the risk of accidents.

* Leave enough room between you and other motorists. Tailgating is responsible for many accidents, even when there is no snow on the ground. In inclement weather, it can take longer to slow or stop the car after pressing on the brakes. Having an additional space between your car and the one in front of you helps you avoid a collision.

* Be aware of black ice. Black ice gets its name from its veritable invisibility. It is so thin and hard to spot, it just looks like the black asphalt of the road. Black ice tends to form in areas that have had snow or ice melt, which then refreezes at night when temperatures drop. Be extra cautious on turns and on highway exit and entrance ramps, where black ice frequently forms.

* Steer your car into the skid. Remain calm and do not panic and jam on the brakes if your car starts to skid. Slamming on the brakes will only exacerbate the skid. Rather, take your foot off the accelerator, allowing the car to naturally slow down as you turn your

wheels into the direction the car is skidding. This should help right the car and get you back on track.

* Invest in snow tires. Those who live in especially snowy climates and do a lot of driving would be wise to purchase snow tires. Snow tires, also called winter tires, have special tread patterns that offer better traction in snow and ice. They also are made from softer rubber compounds than regular tires that retain their flexibility in cold weather, allowing the tire to conform to the surface of the road. Although many vehicles come with technology to prevent accidents, they cannot do their jobs if tires are not maintaining their grip on the road.

All-season tires are not a replacement for snow tires. All-season tires are designed to work in all sorts of conditions, from rainy weather to dry roads. Therefore, it is better to invest in a set of snow tires that will offer you better protection. When putting snow tires on a car or truck, be sure to do so on all the wheels — not just the driving wheels. Otherwise you may still risk spin outs or uneven gripping of the road.

It is not a good idea to keep snow tires on all year. Because they are softer, snow tires tend to be more noisy and can wear out faster in warmer weather. Therefore, switch out the tires at the beginning of the snowy season and then before the spring arrives anew.

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Advice from the Pros: Do Not Neglect Auto Service

(MS) — The average age of a personal vehicle on the road today is more than 11 years, according to recent news reports. In tough economic times, it's natural to rein in spending. But the experts at the nonprofit National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) warn that putting off routine auto maintenance or ignoring service intervals is false economy. Small issues can morph into more expensive repairs. For example, failure to replace worn brake pads or a faulty oxygen sensor — both relatively easy services for qualified auto technicians — can result in expensive brake rotor service or costly replacement of the vehicle's catalytic converter.

Frequently neglected items include oil changes, tire and brake service, wheel alignment, air and fuel filters, and transmission service, according to ASE-certified auto technicians.

Besides, a well-maintained vehicle gets better gasoline mileage, pollutes less, is safer to operate, and lasts longer than one that's neglected, notes ASE.



To help consumers choose a repair shop that fits their needs, ASE offers the following checklist:

* Look for a neat, well-organized facility, with vehicles in the parking lot equal in value to your own and modern equipment in the service bays.

* Look for a courteous staff, with a service consultant willing to answer all of your questions.

* Look for policies regarding estimated repair costs, diagnostic fees, guarantees, and acceptable methods of payment.

* Ask if the repair facility specializes or if it usually handles your type of repair work.

* Look for signs of professionalism in the customer service area, such as civic,

community, or customer service awards.

* Look for evidence of qualified technicians: trade school diplomas, certificates of advanced course work, and certification by ASE.

* Look for the ASE sign or logo; it means the shop employs nationally certified technicians.

The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) was founded in 1972 as a non-profit, independent organization

dedicated to improving the quality of automotive service and repair

through the voluntary testing and certification of automotive technicians.

ASE-certified technicians wear blue and white ASE shoulder insignia and carry credentials listing their exact areas of certification. Their employers often display the blue and white ASE sign. Visit www.ase.com for seasonal car care advice and more.

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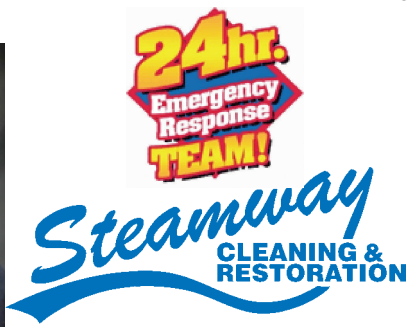
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