

WINTER SAFE DRIVING TIPS

As the temperature drops, your attention to safe driving should rise. Navigating harsh winter conditions requires top skills.

About 22 percent of vehicle crashes are weather related, according to the Federal Highway Administration, and almost half of those accidents occur during snow, sleet or fog or on ice-, snow- or slush-covered pavement.

The Federal Motor Carrier Association's Large Truck Crash Causation Study found 23 percent of large-truck crashes happen when drivers are traveling too fast for conditions. Circumstances that warrant slowing down include slick roadways and reduced visibility caused by snow, sleet and fog.

No deadline is worth risking lives. Responsible customers and carriers will realize this. Giving yourself plenty of time on the front end and then taking your time on the road are the keys to safe winter driving. Here are 13 winter-driving tips:



BE PROACTIVE

Check weather forecasts for your route before and during each trip, and compile a list of safe places to park. When poor conditions are forecast, calculate your speed at 25 mph to help prevent running out of driving hours before you get to a safe location.

MAKE SURE YOUR RIG IS READY

Put a winter focus on your pre-trip inspections and perform en-route inspections more often. Pay particular attention to wiper blades and to lights, which can get covered in road grime quickly when you're driving in snow. Drain truck and trailer air tanks often since condensation in air lines can cause frozen brakes. Knock snow and ice off the truck and trailer before it flies off, potentially causing an accident.

CHAIN UP

Use high-quality, properly fitting tire chains whenever needed. Follow chain and tire manufacturers' instructions for mounting, and check and retighten chains after a mile of driving.

TEST THE SURFACE

Tap your brakes before leaving the parking lot or pulling onto a major road. The way your tractor-trailer reacts will provide a clue to pavement conditions.

DO NOT USE CRUISE CONTROL, OVERDRIVE OR THE JAKE BRAKE ON ICE OR SNOW

The strength of the Jake brake can lock drive tires in wintry weather conditions. It also can cause a jack knife because it slows just the tractor, not the trailer.

KEEP A TIGHT GRIP ON THE WHEEL

Ice patches, high winds and road damage hidden by winter slush can jerk the truck out of your control if you aren't holding the steering wheel firmly in both hands.

FOLLOW YOUR OWN SPEED LIMIT

The posted maximum doesn't apply in adverse conditions; it is likely too fast. Drive at a safe speed given the current environment. If you don't feel safe maintaining the minimum speed posted, ask yourself whether you should be on the road at all.

INCREASE FOLLOWING DISTANCE

To make up for reduced visibility and greatly increased stopping times, lengthen your following distance to two or three times the usual gap.

MONITOR THE ROAD FAR AHEAD

Be on the lookout for potential hazards in order to improve your chances of reacting effectively.

PRACTICE SLOW-MOTION DRIVING

Be overly cautious with all your actions. Accelerate and brake gently. Reduce your speed well ahead of curves and turns.

UNDERSTAND WHEN AND WHERE ROADWAY ICE MAY BE FORMING

If you see ice on your truck's windshield, mirror arms or antenna and no longer notice tire spray from other vehicles, ice could be on the road. Initial patches are typically transparent black ice and form on and under overpasses and in shaded areas.

STAY CALM IF YOUR TIRES START TO LOSE TRACTION

Sudden movement will make the situation worse. Ease off the accelerator while holding the wheel steady or slowly steering in the direction you want to go.

KNOW WHEN TO GET OFF THE ROAD

If road conditions and/or forecasts make you question whether driving safely is possible, review your list of places to park and shut down once you, carefully, arrive at the closest one.