

Cold Weather Car Care

It's almost that time of year again. Will you and your car be ready for winter's unforgiving driving conditions?

The first step to surviving cold-weather driving starts with preparing your car for winter. A breakdown on a frigid winter's night could turn into a life-threatening experience for the ill-prepared. To avoid a disaster, read the following tips and you should make it to spring in tip-top shape:

- **Tune-ups.** Cold weather is extremely demanding on your car. Whether or not you are getting a tune-up, see your mechanic to have him or her double-check hoses, belts and anti-freeze. A weakened hose or belt can break and leave you stranded, or a weak solution of anti-freeze can ice up and damage your cooling system.

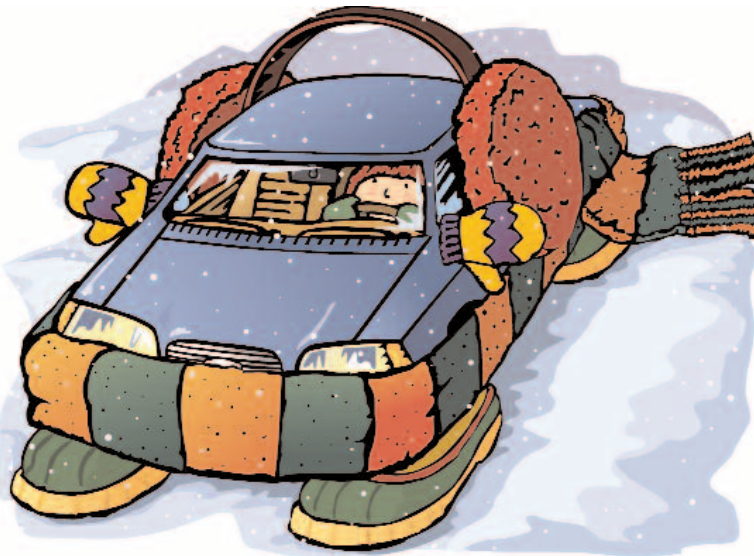
- **Batteries.** In cold weather, a battery's cranking power is reduced significantly, while the electrical power needed to start your car increases.

According to the Car Care Council, you should check that the battery connection is clean, tight and corrosion-free. The battery should be securely mounted. If it is three years old or more, the battery should be tested and replaced if necessary.

- **Heater / Defrosters.** Most drivers and passengers use heaters often enough to recognize a problem — perhaps they notice a burning smell, or only cold air is blowing into the

vehicle's cabin. But what about front and rear defrosters? Before freezing temperatures set in, turn them on and off to check them out too. Driving in freezing conditions without properly functioning defrosters is a dangerous practice.

- **Brakes.** Make sure you have your brakes inspected by a professional if you suspect there is any type of problem. Brakes that are worn down



or damaged can send you into a dangerous skid on wet or icy surfaces.

Knowing the type of brakes your car is equipped with also is important. Read your car's manual to determine the type of brakes you have.

To avoid locking up your tires on slick roads, experts recommend applying steady and firm pressure to the pedal if you have an anti-lock brake system.

If you don't have an anti-lock brake system, use the "squeeze" braking technique — keep your heel on the

floor and use your toes to apply firm pressure to the brake pedal so the wheels nearly lock. If the wheels do lock, ease off the pedal to a point just before locking.

- **Exhaust System.** Have your mechanic double check the exhaust system to see that it is in good shape. Leaks in the system can emit carbon monoxide, a dangerous gas that is odorless and colorless, into your car.

If you become stuck in the snow and want to run the engine and heater, make sure your tail pipe is clear of the snow and crack a window to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, which can be fatal.

- **Window Washer Fluid.** Slush and mud splashed on a windshield is more than an annoyance. It can be potentially dangerous. Wipers without washer fluid will only smear debris back and forth across a windshield, obstructing your view.

That's why washer fluid

is critical, so check the reservoir often to see that it is full. Keep a spare jug in the trunk and never substitute water for washer fluid.

- **Wiper Blades.** Make sure your blades are in excellent condition or replace them with new ones. Even if your regular blades are in good condition, you may want to purchase a rubber coated snow blade that can handle the extra weight of wet snow.

- **Tires.** Make sure your tires have adequate tread with "grip" to propel you through the snow. Anything in

question should be checked by an expert.

Tire pressure is another factor to consider. According to David Solomon, author of *Nutz & Boltz Automotive Survival Guide*, you lose one pound of tire pressure for every ten degrees in temperature drop. Depending on where you live, this could mean a ten-pound air pressure difference between summer and winter, and driving in hazardous road conditions with under-inflated tires is doubly dangerous. Check your tire pressure frequently as the temperature changes, and remember to check your spare.

● **Fuel Tank.** During the winter, never let your tank get below half full for two reasons: first, you will be less likely to get condensation, which can end up freezing in your fuel lines, inside the tank; second, you don't want to run out of gas in an emergency situation.

WINTER DRIVING SAFETY

Now that your car is set mechanically for the coming winter, here are four safe driving habits to adopt. Practice these and you and your car should be in good shape this winter.

1. **See and be seen.** If you park outside, you must deal with the chore of brushing snow off your entire car and scraping ice off windows. While removing snow and ice from your windows and lights is important, it is just as important to brush snow off your car, since a snow-covered vehicle makes it harder for other motorists to see you. A snow-covered car is like wearing camouflage — you actually blend into the background. Be smart and completely remove all snow and ice.

2. **Slow down and allow more distance between vehicles.** The normal two-to-three second following distance recommended on dry pavement should be increased to eight to 10 seconds on icy or snow-covered roads. This allows you extra time and distance to stop and avoid a collision. Driving a slower pace, keeping a safe

distance behind the car ahead of you, and avoiding sudden stops and turns all add up to a wise winter driving policy.



3. **To get yourself unstuck.** Avoid spinning your tires, or you'll dig your car into a hole. Determine the path of

least resistance between your car and solid ground. With this in mind, clear the snow behind and in front of all four tires and liberally spread sand or kitty litter in front of and behind the drive wheels, depending on if you have front- or rear-wheel drive. Keep in mind that the sharper your front wheels are turned, the more resistance to movement in either direction you create. Consequently, try to keep the front tires as straight as possible.

4. **To control your car during a skid.** The most important thing to remember is not to panic. Your first reaction may be to hit the brakes, but don't. This only will make matters worse. Instead, remove your foot from the gas and steer your car in the direction you want it to go. Once the car slows a bit you can steer out of the skid and regain control.

The time and place to learn about handling your car on slippery surfaces is not in traffic. Find a big, level, open parking lot and experiment. Knowing your driving limitations gives you the knowledge you need to judge dangerous situations. ❄️

Winter Driving Kit

Even if you keep a cell phone in your vehicle, don't make the mistake of relying on it for safety. Have a back-up plan, and store the following items in your trunk throughout the winter months:

- Tire chains
- Bag of kitty litter or sand
- Shovel
- Tow rope
- Snow scraper / brush
- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Rags or paper towels
- Jumper cables
- Extra warm clothes, gloves and snow boots
- Blankets or sleeping bag
- Flares
- First-aid kit
- Bottled water
- Basic tool kit
- Matches and candles, housed in a waterproof container
- Extra washer fluid
- High-calorie snack foods, canned fruit, nuts, raisins and /or granola bars
- Can opener

