

WINTER DRIVING

Risk Directory
(December 2015)

Introduction

Driving in snow and icy conditions can be dangerous and lead to increased incidences of accidents and claims. During these periods, it is recommended that driving be avoided unless a journey is absolutely necessary. If a journey is deemed to be vital, drivers should consider whether public transport would be a safer alternative. Otherwise, there are a number of key considerations and actions that will make the journey safer. These may be categorised as follows:

- Journey planning.
- Vehicle preparation.
- Emergency items.
- Driving style.



Journey Planning

Route planning is essential before embarking on the journey. Wherever possible, motorways and other main roads should be used, as these are more likely to have been treated with grit or salt. Drivers should always check for travel disruption via national and local weather forecasts and travel information bulletins, before embarking on the journey.

Vehicle Preparation

Breakdowns are more common in winter months. The vehicle should be serviced and prepared for winter motoring, as there is a greater chance of a breakdown if the vehicle has not been maintained adequately. Specific checks to be taken before setting off include the following:

- All tyres should be checked to ensure they have at least the minimum legal tread depth (1.6mm for cars) and that they are correctly inflated. It is recommended that tyres should have at least 3mm for winter driving.
- Consider changing to winter tyres, though you should confirm with your motor insurers before doing so.
- All exterior lights must be cleared of snow and ice and be functioning properly.
- All windows must be cleared of snow and ice and completely de-misted.
- The roof and bonnet of the vehicle should also be cleared of snow, as this can be dislodged during driving and restrict vision. Snow and ice must also be cleared from vehicle registration plates.
- Windscreen wipers should be working correctly and the screen wash fluid level fully topped up.
- Ensure that there is ample fuel for the journey. It should be borne in mind that more fuel is used when in heavy traffic.

Emergency Items

It is important that a number of emergency items are carried within the vehicle when undertaking a journey in poor winter conditions, particularly long journeys. These include:

- De-icer.
- Scraper.
- Warm clothing and blankets.
- Mobile phone and in-car charger.
- Emergency provisions, such as a bar of chocolate and a flask containing a hot drink.
- Torch and spare batteries.

- Where journeys are unavoidable in particularly bad weather, consideration should be given to carrying a spade.

Driving Style

A number of adjustments to driving style should be made when driving in wintry weather conditions, with drivers being instructed to:

- Set off in second gear, easing gently off the clutch to avoid wheel spin.
- Keep smooth pedal control, particularly when setting off.
- Once the vehicle is in motion, drive at a slow speed in as high a gear as possible, as this reduces wheel spin.
- Drive with extreme caution, as stopping distances can be as much as ten times the normal distance.
- Increase the gap between yourself and the vehicle in front.
- Use headlights when visibility is reduced, such as during heavy rain or snow. Use fog lights when visibility is seriously reduced.
- Use brake lights as an early warning to vehicles behind.
- Be aware that black ice may be present on the road, but is not always visible. When driving over black ice, steering becomes lighter, which can be counteracted by easing off the accelerator and being delicate with steering movements.
- Reduce speed smoothly and in plenty of time. Try to reduce speed by changing down the gears and apply brakes gently.
- Attempt to control skidding by easing off the foot pedals and trying to steer in the direction you want to go, for example, if the rear of the vehicle skids to the right, steer immediately to the right to recover. If your vehicle is fitted with anti-lock brakes, follow the advice given in the vehicle handbook.

It is vitally important for drivers to retain concentration whilst driving, such as by avoiding distractions, which will allow anticipation of situations. This will provide increased time to react accordingly.

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- Property risks.

If you would like to discuss any of these Risk Management services please contact the Risk Management department - General Division, on 0151 236 5656 or via the following e-mail address:

risk@griffithsandarmour.com

References, Acknowledgements & Recommended Further Reading

- Driving At Work: Managing Work-Related Road Safety - INDG382 - HSE Books
- The Highway Code - DfT
- Think! Road Safety Website – www.think.direct.gov.uk
- The Highways Agency – www.highways.gov.uk
- Brake – www.brake.org.uk
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) – www.rosipa.com

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