

### Winter driving

Summer has ended and fall has finally arrived. Farmers are harvesting their summer crop, and the leaves are starting to remind us of why we live in “Colorful Colorado.”

The early mornings and late evenings are brisk, while the daytime temperatures allow us to remain active in pursuit of our favorite outdoor hobbies. However, any seasoned Colorado resident knows that the first snowfall may be right around the corner. There have been instances in previous years where winter weather has surprised us in the middle of the fall season.

Here are a few simple steps to follow in order to be well prepared to drive in winter conditions and increase your safety.

Before you begin your journey, it is important to conduct basic vehicle maintenance. Windshield wipers and tires are year-round safety features that play a very important role in safe winter driving. It is imperative to inspect the tires for proper pressure and adequate tread depth. Additionally, windshield wipers should be checked and replaced as needed before you venture out into the storm. Check the level of windshield washer fluid to ensure it is full.

It is also important to confirm that the vehicle’s heating and defrost systems work correctly. This will minimize the amount of ice that may build up on the windshield causing a view obstruction. All windows need to be clear of snow and ice before driving the vehicle.

The next step is to utilize the local and regional media to check weather forecasts and road conditions. Knowing what to expect will allow you to make informed decisions when planning the trip.

Map your route accordingly, trying to avoid the worst of the storm. When it is actively snowing, it is best to postpone excessive travel as much as possible. However, if you must drive during a

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snowstorm, plan to leave earlier than usual. This will afford you the opportunity to travel at slower speeds without the stress of being behind schedule.

The majority of weather related crashes in Colorado are caused by driving too fast in adverse conditions. Driving at a speed that is reasonable and prudent for the existing conditions is not just good advice, it is also the law. Remember that bridges freeze first and thaw last. Make sure your speed is adjusted appropriately so you are able to slow down in the event you encounter an icy bridge or other obstacle on the road.

Once you are ready to embark on your adventure, it is extremely important to fasten your seatbelt and ensure that all passengers are also properly restrained. While you may do everything in your power to drive cautiously, you cannot control the poor decisions of other drivers. Wearing your seatbelt increases your level of safety and reduces the potential for serious injuries.

While driving on snow-covered or icy roads, keep both hands on the steering wheel and both eyes on the road. Be aware of your surroundings, including the other motorists on the road. In order to minimize potential distractions, now is the time you should have your cell phone in your pocket.

Remember that texting while driving is not only illegal, it is also deadly! Another simple step is to tune your radio or iPod to your favorite selection so you will not be tempted to tamper with these devices during the drive. Decreasing distractions will increase the likelihood of a safe arrival.

Have a safe journey, and let's not meet by accident!

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