

Slip Sliding Away

It's that time of year again, when the temperature starts to drop. No matter where you live, you experience the dip in temperature, sometimes in a very extreme fashion. What is meant by "extreme cold" and its effects will vary across different areas of the country. In regions that aren't used to winter weather, near freezing temperatures are considered "extreme cold" whereas in others the temperature has to be well below zero to get the residents attention.

Whichever end of the spectrum you live in, these extremes will affect your life and possibly your health. When temperatures drop below normal and as the wind picks up, your body will cool more rapidly. This can lead to many potentially serious health problems. Extreme cold can be a dangerous situation for people that are susceptible like those that work outside, who are stranded or live in a home that is poorly insulated or without heat. These stresses will also take their toll on your family vehicle as well as the vehicles you drive once you get to work. The best way to protect yourself and family is to plan ahead and again this includes your family's vehicles.

The first step to planning ahead for winter driving is to get your vehicle serviced and prepped before the severe weather begins. It's good to have your car tuned-up, either by a mechanic or you, if you do your own vehicle maintenance. Cold weather puts more of a strain on your vehicle's battery, so be certain that the battery has sufficient voltage for starting in the colder weather. If you live in an area where snow is an issue and use snow tires, it's time to get them on. No matter what type of tire your vehicle has on, it's also good to inspect the treads and air pressure on a monthly basis. Visibility can be a problem in the winter. It's important to keep the windshield washer reservoir filled in winter with no-freeze fluids, be certain the wipers don't need to be replaced and that both the front and rear defrosters are working correctly.

Although you may not live where the snow flies, winter driving can still be dangerous and scary. Additional preparations can help make a winter trip safer and less stressful, whether it's across town to the jobsite or across the state. These preparations can also help you deal with a driving emergency. To help keep you and your family safe on the road this winter remember the Three P's of Safe Winter Driving.

- Prepare for the trip
 - Make sure your car is maintained. It's important to check your car's battery, tire tread and windshield wipers and fluid before a long trip and periodically through the winter months.
 - During the winter months it's a good idea to be sure you have items in your car that will help make driving and surviving an emergency easier. This includes a flashlight, jumper cables, abrasive material like kitty litter, a shovel, a snowbrush/ice scraper and blankets. If going on a longer trip, it will be helpful to include food, water, medication and a cell phone.
 - If your car stops or stalls unexpectedly, stay with it and don't over exert yourself. It can be helpful to mark the antenna or windows with something brightly colored to make your vehicle easier for other motorists to see. If you keep the car running be certain the exhaust pipe is clear of snow and only run it long enough to keep warm.

- Winter travel can be unpredictable, always allow for plenty of time to reach your destination and check the weather before you leave. It's also helpful to let others know your route and what time you plan to arrive.
- Protect yourself
 - Always be sure that everyone in the vehicle is buckled up and that any child safety seats are installed and used properly.
 - Remember that rear-facing infant seats should NEVER be placed in a front seat that has an air bag.
 - Although they may not appreciate this fact, children 12 and under are MUCH safer buckled into the back seats.
- Prevent crashes
 - Never mix drugs and alcohol with driving! This is almost more important in winter because of the unpredictable conditions of snow and ice.
 - Slow down and allow for longer following distances between you and other cars.
 - It is important to get plenty of rest before a trip and stop for a break at least every three hours and change off drivers if at all possible.
 - Keep your eyes open for pedestrians. It gets darker a lot earlier in the winter so it can be more difficult to see people walking along the roadway, be alert!

Advance preparation will make driving in the winter a much easier and safer proposition, whether you live in Florida or Alaska.

For additional help with safety and OSHA compliance, take advantage of the resources available through NCMA. These resources include the NCMA Block Plant Safety Software. The software is available from NCMA at (703) 713-1900 at a cost of \$150 for up to 3 plants/year (nonmember \$450).