

# Winter driving advice note

Accessible version



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## 1 Introduction

Research shows that most of us are unprepared for severe weather conditions, It also showed that drivers believe having de-icer and an ice scraper was sufficient preparation.

There are simple steps and measures we can take to keep ourselves safe this winter. Police Scotland offer the following advice.

## 2 Windows

- It's of utmost importance that you can see properly out of your windscreen and windows when driving. Make sure all snow and ice and mist is cleared from your windows.
- Use de-icer. Apply de-icer to break down the ice. If the ice is thick, use your window scraper to score the ice, as this can improve the de-icer's effectiveness. (Tip: applying de-icer the night before can prevent ice building up).
- Clear snow from the roof of your vehicle as well.

## 3 Lights

- Make sure all your lights are working – Includes headlights, indicators, brake lights and fog lights.
- Ensure that the lenses are clean.
- As well as being able to see where you are going, it's important that people can see you, especially in the winter.
- Use dipped headlights when driving in heavy snow, as they help when visibility is poor without dazzling other drivers.
- Fog lights should be used when visibility becomes less than 100 metres in front of you. Remember to switch them off when visibility increases.

## 4 Tyres

- Check that all your tyres are in good condition and check for any obvious faults like cracks, bulges or exposed cord. Also check your alloys/steel wheels for dents or damage.
- Check tread depth, the legal tread depth for cars/vans is 1.6mm. For motorcycles and HGVs it is 1mm.

- While 1.6mm is the legal minimum tire tread depth, having more tread is crucial in winter or snow because deeper treads provide better grip, improve traction, and reduce the risk of hydroplaning or sliding on icy, wet, or snowy roads.
- Check tyre pressure. In winter tyre pressure reduces due to the colder temperatures which also increases fuel consumption. You can check the recommended PSI figure in your car's manual, online. (Mention Sticker usually found on inside of driver's door shut)
- Consider fitting all weather tyres or winter tyres
- Check tread across the whole tyre as wear can be uneven
- Check for any bulges on the sidewall
- Check for any exposed cord/ply

## 5 Wipers

- Don't use old wipers if it's frosty - if it's particularly cold or frosty, then leaving your windscreen wipers on auto while parked should be a no-go. If they freeze to the screen you could damage the blades, the wiper's motor, and even risk small scratches to your windscreen.
- For those reasons, we also recommend you replace worn or damaged blades to keep the risk of damage down. Check if there are any cracks or splits in the blades and buy new ones if they're not working as well as they used to. Winter will do its best to throw all sorts of extra grime at your windscreen.

## 6 Braking

- Brake early and slowly.
- Avoid heavy braking, this could result in the wheels locking and a loss of directional control.
- Instead of using the brake pedal, cycle down the gears to use engine braking (you can tap the brake pedal lightly to make drivers behind aware that you're slowing down).

## 7 Fluid Levels

- Screen wash, ensure that it contains anti freeze (Capable of low temperatures).
- Coolant should be between the minimum and maximum level. if its needs topped up, you'll need 50 – 50 mix of water and antifreeze. NB do not remove the fillers cap unless the engine is cold.
- Brake fluid should be between the minimum and maximum line, if it is below it may indicate a leak.

## 8 Useful tips for driving in snow

- Accelerate gently, stay in a higher gear.
- Keep a good distance from the vehicle front and avoid heavy braking.
- In ice and snow, it can take 10 times the distance to stop under braking, as much as 771 metres from 70 miles per hour!
- Be extra cautious at road junctions particularly where road markings may not be visible.
- Reduce your speed and take care when overtaking on multi lane carriageways as they may not be clear of drifting snow.
- Electric and automatic cars. Use eco mode.

## 9 Essential Kit

Whilst not an exhaustive list, the following items should be considered and make up the bare minimum of what to carry in winter and extreme weather.

- **First Aid Kit**
  - Check contents regularly to ensure everything is still useable.
  - Keep extra foil blankets if possible, use these before you start to feel cold as they are designed to retain body heat, not increase your temperature.
- **Ice scraper and shovel**
  - Ensure you have a way of effectively clearing your windows.
  - Ability to clear snow from around your vehicle should you become stuck.
- **High visibility tabard and warning triangle**
  - Allows you to be seen by approaching vehicles in inclement weather.
  - Warning triangles should be suitably placed providing plenty of warning rather than directly behind your vehicle.
- **Spare food and water**
  - Ensure you have enough spare drinking water for you and your passengers
  - Long life snacks such as cereal bars can be kept in the vehicle throughout winter
- **Warm clothing**
  - We can't always rely on our vehicles heating so it is always recommended to keep extra clothing in your vehicle in case you become stuck in extreme weather

- **Spare fuel**
  - Whilst you have enough fuel for your planned journey, carrying extra fuel during extreme weather is recommended.
  - Unexpected diversions, road closures or becoming stuck may result in you requiring more fuel to keep your engine running/carrying on your journey.
- **Battery Packs**
  - Whilst we may carry cables to charge items such as mobile phones within our vehicles we need to be prepared for mechanical failure
  - Carrying a battery pack within your vehicle allows you to stay connected and contact emergency services/recovery if required
  - Tip – Keep your battery pack charging from your vehicle when driving to ensure it is always full
- **Sleeping Bag**
  - Should you become stranded overnight or in extremely low temperatures, carrying a simple sleeping bag may be a lifesaver.
  - Keep them in a bag or other container which will prevent them from becoming damp as this can reduce their heat retaining properties.

## 10 Storms

- Driving during storms/high winds is particularly dangerous.
- There is a high risk of falling trees, branches and utility cables such as electricity and phone lines.
- Localised flooding may occur.
- If driving a high sided vehicle, you may experience sidewinds which could cause the vehicle to lose control of fall on to its side.
- Ask yourself, is this safe, do I need to make this journey?
- If you come across a fallen powerline contact Police Scotland and dial 105 (SSEN Emergency line). Do not attempt to move the cable or drive over it.
- Do not brake or accelerate harshly over puddles, this can cause aquaplaning resulting in a loss of steering control.
- In high winds, give pedal cycles, motorcycles and heavy goods vehicles extra room when passing.

## 11 Flooding

Avoid driving in flooded conditions if you can. If you come across flooding and are not sure how deep the water is, turn around and find an alternative route. At best you could damage your car, at worst you could be swept away. Flooding can drastically worsen very quickly, so always be careful and check for weather warnings.

- Just 6 inches of water can stall cars, with 12 inches causing some to float.
- Flooded roads may conceal potholes, debris, or downed power lines.
- Fast-moving water can easily sweep vehicles away.
- **Assess Before Crossing:** Only cross if water is shallow and not flowing.
- **Drive Slowly:** Enter water slowly, maintain a steady pace, and avoid stopping.
- **Check Brakes After:** Test and dry brakes after exiting water.
- **If you stall:** Do not restart the engine; exit the vehicle if necessary.
- Decisions to close roads are not taken lightly, they are closed for a reason. Even if the road looks clear at the point of closure there is likely to be heavy flooding on the route and there may be hidden hazards/dangers that you can't see. There could also be emergency or road workers on the roadway.
- **If you drive through a road closure and put others at risk you could be considered as driving dangerously or carelessly.**
- **If unsure, don't drive through.**

## 12 Weather Warnings

- What should you do when there's a warning?
- Weather warnings are designed to let people know there's a potential for impacts in their location. This means that any warning we issue should make you think about what steps you can take to minimise the chances of disruption for you.
- **Yellow:** You should check the details of the forecast and consider taking steps to minimise impacts for you and your household. Even in a yellow warning area, people will see disruption to a greater or lesser extent, so it's important to check the details and see which steps you could take to prepare.
- **Amber:** Disruption from an Amber warning is more likely and more widespread. You should change plans that could be impacted by the weather and take action to protect yourself and your property.
- **Red:** These warnings are reserved for very dangerous weather with a high level of certainty. You should take direct action to keep yourself and others safe from impacts of the weather.

It's likely there will be a risk to life, as well as substantial disruption to travel and infrastructure.

- Source – Met Office <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/seasonal-advice/when-and-why-do-we-issue-warnings>

### **13 What to do if you get stuck**

- Don't panic
- If you are on the road, warn others by use of a warning triangle/gain their attention
- Render the assistance of other road users and contact Police if required
- Keep warm, layer up before you begin to feel cold

### **14 Further Information**

- Whilst this document provides an insight into winter driving techniques and how to prepare and stay safe on our roads this winter, there are various official sources of information available.
- Consider if your journey is absolutely necessary
- Plan ahead and let others know your destination and route
- Get up to date traffic updates - <https://www.traffic.gov.scot/>
- If you require further information, please contact your local Police Scotland Road Policing Unit