

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of October 21, 2013 – Winter Vehicle Safety

Of all the seasons, winter requires the most care and preparation if you're to stay safe and avoid a breakdown. Breakdowns are more common at this time of the year and road conditions can be really challenging, particularly when snow and ice strike. Before the rough weather comes, make sure you are properly prepared. Here are a number of items you should check before you take off for the slopes or to visit friends and relatives for the approaching holidays.

- Blanket, rug or sleeping bag
- Shovel
- Reflective jacket(s)
- Ice scraper and de-icer
- Flash light and extra batteries
- Tow rope
- Snow chains (if you live in a remote or rural area)
- Battery jump leads
- Bottled water
- Snacks ó chocolate or cereal bars

Other Year-round essentials should include:

- Fully-charged mobile phone and in-car charger
- Sunglasses ó to deal with glare from the sun or snow
- Personal medication
- Warning triangle
- Spare tire
- First aid kit
- Road atlas ó in case of diversions (remember, cell phone reception can be poor in areas)
- (having a membership for road-side assistance can be a life-saver)

Before taking off on your journey, make sure the following is checked

- **Antifreeze** ó check coolant level regularly and, if required, top-up with a mixture of the correct type of antifreeze. Your garage should check concentration to ensure adequate cold temperature protection.
- **Battery** ó the most common cause of winter breakdowns. A battery more than five years old may struggle in the cold - get it checked and replaced if necessary to avoid the inconvenience of an unplanned failure.
- **Fuel** ó keep at least a quarter of a tank in case of unexpected delay.
- **Lights** ó check and clean all lights regularly to make sure you can see and be seen clearly. Carry spare bulbs.
- **Tires** ó should have at least 3mm of tread for winter motoring. Consider winter tyres for improved safety. Check pressures at least every fortnight.
- **Windscreen** ó reduce dazzle from the low sun by keeping the screen clean inside and out. Now is a good time to renew worn wiper blades.
- **Locks and door seals** ó stop doors freezing shut with a thin coat of polish or Vaseline on rubber door seals. A squirt of water dispersant (WD-40) in locks will help stop them freezing.

Driving in snow and ice demands your attention. Gentle maneuvers are the key to safe driving. It is important to know that stopping distances are 10 times longer in ice and snow. Other practices include:

- Wear comfortable, dry shoes for driving. Cumbersome, snow-covered boots will slip on the pedals.
- Pull away in second gear, easing your foot off the clutch gently to avoid wheel-spin.
- Up hill - avoid having to stop part way up by waiting until it is clear of other cars or by leaving plenty of room to the car in front. Keep a constant speed, choosing the most suitable gear well in advance to avoid having to change down on the hill.
- Down hill - reduce your speed before the hill, use a low gear and try to avoid using the brakes. Leave as much room as possible between you and the car in front.
- If you have to use brakes then apply them gently. Release the brakes and de-clutch if the car skids.
- Automatic transmission - under normal driving conditions (motorways, etc) it's best to select 'Drive' and let the gearbox do the work throughout the full gear range. In slippery, snowy conditions it's best to select '2', which limits the gear changes and also makes you less reliant on the brakes. Some autos have a 'Winter' mode which locks out first gear to reduce the risk of wheel spin. Check the handbook.

If you get stuck, straighten the steering and clear the snow from the wheels. Put a sack or old rug in front of the driving wheels to give the tires some grip. Once on the move again, try not to stop until you reach firmer ground.

Batteries rarely last longer than five years. Replacing one near the end of its life can save a lot of time and inconvenience at the side of the road.

A continuous squealing noise as soon as the engine is started is a sign the water pump is frozen - it's the fan belt slipping on the pulley. The cylinder block could be frozen too. Stop the engine immediately and allow it to thaw out. This may take several days unless the car can be moved to a heated garage.

If the car begins to overheat a few miles from home it's likely that the radiator has frozen preventing coolant from circulating. Stop straight away to avoid serious damage and allow the radiator to thaw.

Keep the windshield and other windows clear. If your vision is obscured through dirt, snow or even sticker-infested car windows you could face a hefty fine. Clear snow from the roof as well as from windows as this can fall onto the windscreen obscuring your view. It can be a hazard to other road users as well.

Make sure your tires have at least 3mm of tread for winter motoring, and certainly no less than 2mm (remember the penny test?- if you can see Abe Lincoln's head when you inset the penny into the tread, chances are your tire is worn). Also, don't reduce tire pressures to get more grip as it doesn't work, and reduces stability.

Before you go: Get up at least 10 minutes early to give you time to prepare the car. Don't drive off like a tank-commander, with a tiny hole cleared in the windscreen. Clear all windows using a scraper and de-icer. Your planned route should include as many major roads as possible, as these are more likely to have been cleared and gritted.

Put safety before punctuality when the bad weather closes in. Allow extra time for winter journeys but be prepared for the inevitability of being late for work due to unexpected delay.

We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.

George Bernard Shaw