

Driving in Severe Weather

Helping you steer clear
of trouble





This guide has been written to help you stay safe on the roads this winter. It includes advice from the Highways Agency and the *Met Office and is supported by the Driving Standards Agency, the THINK! Campaign and the Institute of Advanced Motorists.



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Winter Journey Checklist



You should pay extra attention to planning your journey in severe weather. Before you travel, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I really need to travel now? Or can my journey wait until the weather improves?
- Should I plan an alternative route for my journey?
- Have I checked my route for delays ahead?
- Have I checked what the weather will be like along my route?
- Is my car ready for a journey in poor weather?
- Do I have an emergency kit? (See pg 8)
- Are there locations on my route where I will need to take special care? (See pg 9)
- Will I need to change my driving style to suit the weather or conditions?

During your journey remember this critical question:

- If I had to brake suddenly in an emergency, could I stop safely within the distance I can clearly see ahead of me?

If you are unsure how to answer any of these questions, please take time to read this leaflet carefully – or visit our website at:

www.highways.gov.uk/knowledge/2244.aspx

Introduction

Wind and rain, ice and snow – winter can throw the very worst at us. So, to help you prepare for bad weather, here's some helpful advice from the Highways Agency, who look after the motorways and major A roads in England.



There are lots of things you can do to make your journey less stressful. Simple steps, such as taking an emergency kit and checking your route for delays before you set out, and taking an alternative route if you need to, can make your journey easier.

When you're on the road, pay attention to the changing road, traffic and weather conditions. Be ready to slow down and take more care if you need to, particularly on bends and exposed roads. Don't be lulled into a false sense of security – even if you drive every day on the same stretch of road.

When freezing temperatures are forecast, you'll see our winter fleet out and about treating the roads with salt. We are updating the fleet with new ultra modern spreading vehicles which distribute the salt with less waste. During severe weather, it's a round-the-clock operation to reduce the effects of ice and snow.

You can use the Highways Agency's information services to check for delays on the major roads. This year, we are working closely with the Met Office again, so we've got the latest information on weather conditions too.

Call **08700 660 115** for live traffic information or visit www.highways.gov.uk

Stay safe in severe weather

Highways Agency Traffic Officers are now a familiar sight on our motorways. Eris Robertson, who patrols in the East region, talks about why it's important to be ready for bad weather.



"Traffic Officers patrol England's motorways 24-hours a day, seven days a week. We deal with many incidents that would have been much less stressful for the people involved if they had been ready for bad weather."

"So my advice is to be well prepared, whatever the weather. Make sure you know exactly where you're going, what roads you're taking, and check for delays and bad weather before you leave. Listen to travel and weather news when you are driving so you know what to expect."

"If really bad weather is forecast, ask yourself if you need to travel at all, even if it's only a short, familiar journey."

"If you do need to travel then here are some essential tips to make your journey as safe as possible".



1. Get your vehicle ready for winter



“My first recommendation is to make sure your vehicle is in good running order before you leave. Carry out these checks regularly and especially before a long journey”.

- Have your vehicle serviced – then you know it won't let you down.
- Before winter, check and replace the anti-freeze in the radiator.
- If the battery is not reliable – replace it. Most batteries last between two and four years.
- Lights can get filthy with all the spray in winter. Keep them clean and check the bulbs often so you're ready for lower visibility and shorter days.
- Check your tyres are correctly inflated to the manufacturer's recommended pressure for your vehicle and its load. Replace tyres if the tread has reached the legal minimum. Remember, you will need good depth of tread to grip the road in wet or icy conditions.
- Keep your windscreen clean. Dirty windows and mirrors can make it hard to see in low winter sun, not to mention the extra spray, ice and rain in winter. Replace worn wiper blades.
- Before driving off, make sure your windows are clear of mist, ice and snow, inside and out.
- Finally, don't forget to take a map for any unplanned diversions.

2. Emergency kits are essential



Keep an emergency kit in the car:
“It’s worth taking a few minutes to put a few items in your car that may be essential when standing on the hard shoulder of the motorway”.

✓ **Ice scraper and de-icer**



✓ **Torch**



✓ **Warm clothes and a blanket**



✓ **A pair of boots**



✓ **First-aid kit**



✓ **Battery jump leads**



✓ **A shovel for snow**



✓ **Food and a warm drink in a flask**



✓ **Sunglasses in the glove box to help you see in low winter sun**



Make sure your mobile phone is charged fully in case a roadside phone is not available.



3. Be aware of changing road and weather conditions



– even if it’s a road you use regularly.

You may need to change the way you drive:

“Even after roads have been treated in winter, driving conditions may remain challenging, especially on stretches where the local road layout or landscape means there is a greater risk of ice forming”.

Watch out for locations where you may need to drive more carefully, either because of side winds or a greater risk of ice. Some common examples are:

- Changes in road elevation or exposure.
- Where the road passes under or over a bridge.
- Things at the side of the road that shade the carriageway (e.g. trees, bridges, or other structures).
- Where there is less traffic use (e.g. slip roads).
- Bends in the road where there is a greater risk of loss of control. Reduce your speed when approaching a bend and don’t brake suddenly.

Drive safely in poor weather



“We see a lot of collisions that are caused by people not braking in time when the roads are wet or slippery. If it's foggy, raining, snowing or icy, make sure you slow down and keep well back from the vehicle in front of you”.



Driving in fog

- Use dipped headlights so other drivers can see you.
- If it's really foggy (less than 100m visibility) and you can't see much, then switch your fog lights and rear high intensity lights on.
- Fog is often patchy so try not to speed up as visibility improves. You could suddenly find yourself back in thick fog further up the road.

Driving through ice and snow

- Clear any snow on the roof of the vehicle before you drive off. It can slip down over the windscreen and obscure your view.
- It's not always obvious that the road is icy. Look for clues such as ice on the pavement or on your windscreen, before you start your journey. If your tyres are making virtually no noise on the road it could be a sign that you're driving on ice.
- Don't brake – it will just lock up your wheels and you'll skid further.
- In severe cold or snowy conditions, look out for winter service vehicles spreading salt or using snow ploughs. They'll have flashing amber beacons and will be travelling at slower speeds – around 40mph. Stay well back because salt or spray is thrown across the road. Don't overtake unless it is safe to do so – there may be uncleared snow on the road ahead.



Driving in the rain

- When the road's wet, it can take twice as long to stop. So it makes sense to slow down and maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front.
- If your vehicle loses its grip, or “aquaplanes” on surface water take your foot off the accelerator to slow down. Don't brake or steer suddenly because you have no control of the steering or brakes.

Driving in windy weather

- Take extra care on the roads and plan your journeys by checking the latest weather conditions.
- High-sided vehicles are particularly affected by windy weather but strong gusts can also blow a vehicle, cyclist, motorcyclist, or horse rider off course. This can happen on open stretches of road exposed to strong crosswinds, or when passing bridges, high-sided vehicles or gaps in trees.

Floods

- Try to avoid driving through surface water as you might flood your engine. The deepest water is usually nearest the kerb.
- If you have to drive through floods, drive slowly, use a low gear and try to keep the engine revving at a high rate. Move forward continuously to avoid stalling the engine. In driving an automatic vehicle engage and hold in a low gear.
- Test your brakes after driving through water; they may be ineffective.



4. If you break down on the motorway



- Pull onto the hard shoulder, park as far over to the left as you can, away from traffic, and turn on your hazard warning lights.
- Get yourself and any passengers out of the vehicle immediately, using the doors on the left hand side, furthest from the traffic. While you wait for help, keep well away from the carriageway and hard shoulder - stand over the barrier if it's safe to do so - and do not try even the simplest of repairs.
- Try to use the emergency roadside telephones rather than a mobile phone. This will help traffic officers and emergency services know exactly where you are.



5. More information to help you on your journey



- You can get all the latest information on road conditions on England's motorways and trunk roads by visiting the Highways Agency website at: **www.highways.gov.uk** or by calling the Highways Agency Information Line on: **0300 123 5000**



- You can listen to Traffic Radio on Digital radio or via the internet on: **www.trafficradio.org.uk** or listen to local radio for up-to-date bulletins.



- For information on weather conditions, consult the Met Office website at: **www.metoffice.gov.uk** or listen to local radio broadcasts.



- For further information on driving in bad weather see The Official Highway Code by visiting: **www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring**

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Got a question or comment?

0300 123 5000*

email: ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

Live traffic information

08700 660 115*

www.highways.gov.uk

24 hours a day, 365 days a year

*Calls from landlines to 0300 and 08700 numbers can cost up to 8p per minute but are free from some landline providers; mobiles usually cost more. Please check costs with your service provider.

Safety at roadworks



The Highways Agency is working with the industry and road users to reduce the risks of working on the roads.

For the safety of roadworkers and all road users, when you are approaching roadworks:

- Keep within the speed limit – it is there for your safety.
- Get into the correct lane in good time – don't keep switching.
- Concentrate on the road ahead, not the roadworks.
- Be alert for works traffic leaving or entering roadworks.
- Keep a safe distance – there could be queues in front.
- Observe all signs – they are there to help you.

i If you need help using this or any other Highways Agency information, please call **0300 123 5000** and we will assist you.

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