

Driving in the Winter FactSheet

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Even in Texas the onset of winter can bring severe winter weather conditions. Employers and employees who drive for a living need to be aware of how to drive in winter weather. The leading cause of death during a winter storm is driving accidents and multiple vehicle accidents are more likely in severe winter weather conditions. Employers and employees can take steps to increase safety while driving in winter weather.

- Plan ahead and allow plenty of time for travel. An employer should maintain information on its employees' driving destinations, driving routes, and estimated time of arrivals. Drivers should be patient while driving, because trip time can increase in winter weather.
- Winterize vehicles before traveling in winter weather. Before driving have a mechanic check the following items on vehicles: battery; antifreeze; wipers and windshield washer fluid; ignition system; thermostat; lights; flashing hazard lights; exhaust system; heater; brakes; defroster; tires (check for adequate tread); and oil level (if necessary, replace existing oil with a winter oil of the SAE 10w/30 weight variety). Also carry a windshield scraper and small broom for ice and snow removal.
- Check area weather conditions on the radio, television, or the Internet before traveling. For information on road conditions in Texas contact the Texas Department of Transportation at 1-800-452-9292 or visit their website at www.dot.state.tx.us. For information on weather nationwide visit the National Weather Service website at www.nws.noaa.gov for weather information.
- **Winter Storm Outlook** is issued prior to a Winter Storm Watch when forecasters believe winter storm conditions are possible.

- **Winter Storm Watch** alerts the public to the possibility of a blizzard, heavy snow, freezing rain, or heavy sleet.



- **Winter Storm Warning** is issued when a combination of heavy snow, heavy freezing rain, or heavy sleet is expected.
- **Winter Weather Advisories** are issued when accumulations of snow, freezing rain, freezing drizzle, and sleet may cause significant inconvenience and moderately dangerous conditions.
- **Snow** is frozen precipitation formed when temperatures are below freezing in most of the atmosphere from the earth's surface to cloud level.
- **Sleet**, also known as ice pellets, is formed when precipitation or raindrops freeze before hitting the ground. Sleet usually bounces when hitting a surface and does not stick to objects, but can accumulate like snow.
- **Freezing Rain** is rain that falls as liquid and freezes when it reaches the ground or touches a freezing object or other exposed surfaces on the ground. In winter weather bridges and overpasses are the first place freezing rain happens.
- **Freezing Fog** is when fog is present and the air temperature is below zero.
- **Wind Chill Warning** is issued when wind chill temperatures are expected to be less than 34 degrees below zero. Wind chill is the combination of the temperature and wind speed which makes the temperature feel colder.

- **Wind Chill Advisory** is issued when wind chill temperatures are expected to be between 20 below and 34 degrees below zero.
- Buckle up. The driver and any passengers should always wear a safety belt. If children are in the vehicle use child safety seats properly.
- Use caution when driving on bridges and overpasses. Elevated roadways like bridges and overpasses are the first roadways to freeze in winter weather.
- Reduce speed and increase following distances. In winter weather a vehicle needs three times more space to stop on possibly slick roadways. Also, visibility can be reduced due to the weather conditions.
- Do not drink and drive. Driving after consuming alcohol is dangerous, because alcohol can impair a driver's judgment, vision, and reaction.
- Stay in the vehicle if stranded or stalled and wait for help. A driver should not leave the vehicle if stranded. Drivers should keep a cell phone or two-way radio with them and keep the battery charged, when traveling in winter weather. This will enable drivers to call for help and notify the authorities of their location.

An employer may operate a business in an area or have employees who may drive in areas that the experience severe winter weather, if so, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration suggests each vehicle have a winter storm kit. The kit should include:

- mobile phone or cell phone with a charger and extra battery;
- blankets and sleeping bags;
- flash light with extra batteries;
- first-aid kit;
- knife;
- non-perishable food;
- extra clothing, matches, sand or cat litter;
- shovel;
- windshield scraper and brush;
- tool kit;
- tow rope;
- battery booster cables;
- water container;
- compass; and
- road maps.

On long trips the kit should also include:

- water;
- non-perishable food;
- non-electric can opener; and
- medications.

This publication was produced with information from the National Weather Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Commission Against Drunk Driving, Texas Department of Transportation, and Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI, DWC).