

Even experienced drivers can find their nerves and skills tested by winter road conditions.

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) warns motorists to avoid all unnecessary travel in winter weather.

If it's not a health or safety emergency, **stay off the roads when it snows!**

These tips will help you prepare to drive more safely in winter weather:

- Before beginning your trip, know the current road conditions and latest weather forecast.
- For statewide highway information 24 hours a day, call 511 or visit www.511virginia.org.
- Also call the VDOT Customer Service Center 800-FOR-ROAD (800-367-7623) to report hazardous road conditions or for other road-related questions.
- Make sure your vehicle is ready for winter. Check your:
 - Brakes and tires
 - Battery and ignition system
 - Antifreeze and thermostat
 - Windshield wipers and de-icing washer fluid
 - Headlights, tail and brake lights, blinkers and emergency flashers
 - Exhaust system, heater and defroster
 - Oil
- Properly lubricate door locks prone to freezing.
- Keep your car's windows, mirrors and lights clear of snow and ice.
- Always wear your seat belt.
- Leave a few minutes early.
- Start out slowly in the lowest gear recommended by your vehicle's manufacturer.
- Be aware of potentially icy areas such as shady spots and bridges.
- Keep a safe distance of at least five seconds behind other vehicles and trucks that are plowing the road.
- Don't pass a snowplow or spreader unless it is absolutely necessary. Treat these as you would emergency-response vehicles.
- Keep an "emergency winter-driving kit" in your car.
- Drive smart and pay close attention. Don't text and drive – it's a secondary offense in Virginia.

Do NOT Travel During Winter Storms

- The safest place during a winter storm is indoors. About 70 percent of deaths related to ice and snow occur in automobiles.
- Leave work early or to avoid travel during a winter storm. Or if necessary, plan to stay longer at the office for safety's sake.
- If motorists stay off the roads during a winter storm, transportation workers and public-safety officials can clear roads and respond more quickly to emergency needs.

Weather Changes Quickly

- Be prepared for the worst. Leave the office an hour or two early or be ready to spend more time there, to avoid a longer and more dangerous commute home during the height of a storm.
- Keep an emergency supply kit in your office and car.

Heed Local, State Officials

- When local or state officials advise residents to stay off the roads, then stay off the roads.
- Public-safety and emergency-management officials base travel advisories and guidance on National Weather Service forecasts. Heed their advice.
- Businesses that follow closing/delay policies from local jurisdictions or the federal Office of Personnel Management should monitor those sources and release employees when advised.

Monitor Weather Reports

- Listen to local radio/TV weather forecasts; monitor social media.
- Sign up for text alerts from your local government.
- Sign up for weather alerts from NOAA/National Weather Service, including RSS feeds of your forecast and weather watches/warnings.
- Get a NOAA weather radio for your home and office. NOAA Weather Radio is the prime alerting and critical information delivery system of the National Weather Service (NWS). NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts warnings, watches, forecasts, and other hazard information 24 hours a day.

(More)

BE PREPARED FOR WINTER DRIVING (continued)

If You Get Stuck in Your Vehicle

If a blizzard traps you in your car or truck, keep these guidelines in mind:

- Pull off the highway. Turn on hazard lights and hang a distress flag from the radio antenna or window.
- Make yourself visible to rescuers:
 - Turn on the dome light at night when running engine.
 - Tie a colored cloth (preferably red) to your antenna or door.
 - Raise the hood indicating trouble after snow stops falling.
- Remain in your vehicle where rescuers are most likely to find you. Do not set out on foot unless you can see a building close by where you know you can take shelter. Be careful; distances are distorted by blowing snow. A building may seem close, but be too far to walk to in deep snow.
- Run the engine and heater about 10 minutes each hour to keep warm. When the engine is running, open an upwind window slightly for ventilation. This will protect you from possible carbon monoxide poisoning. Periodically clear snow from the exhaust pipe.
- Exercise to maintain body heat, but avoid overexertion. Vigorously move your arms, legs, fingers and toes to keep blood circulating and to keep warm.
- In extreme cold, use road maps, seat covers, and floor mats for insulation. Huddle with passengers and use your coat for a blanket.
- Take turns sleeping. One person should be awake at all times to look for rescue crews.
- Drink fluids to avoid dehydration.
- Be careful not to waste battery power. Balance electrical energy needs – the use of lights, heat, and radio – with supply.
- Turn on the inside light at night so work crews or rescuers can see you.
- If stranded in a remote area, stomp large block letters in an open area spelling out HELP or SOS and line with rocks or tree limbs to attract the attention of rescue personnel who may be surveying the area by airplane.
- Leave the car and proceed on foot – if necessary – once the storm passes.

Emergency Winter Driving Kit Should Have:

- Flashlight and extra batteries
- Ice scraper
- Cell phone and charger
- Jumper cables
- Blankets or quilts
- First aid kit
- Bottled water
- Non-perishable food (nuts, energy bars)
- Abrasive material for traction (cat litter, sand)
- Shovel

Studded snow tires

Studded snow tires are permitted in Virginia, but only from October 15 to April 15. The Code of Virginia states:

§ 46.2-1044. Cleats, etc., on tires; chains; tires with studs. No tire on a vehicle moved on a highway shall have on its periphery any block, stud, flange, cleat, spike, or any other protuberance of any material other than rubber which projects beyond the tread of the traction surface of the tire. It shall be permissible, however, to use on the highways farm machinery having protuberances which will not injure the highway and to use tire chains of reasonable proportions when required for safety because of snow, ice, or other conditions tending to cause a vehicle to slide or skid. It shall also be permissible to use on any vehicle whose gross weight does not exceed 10,000 pounds tires with studs which project no more than one-sixteenth of an inch beyond the tread of the traction surface of the tire when compressed if the studs cover no more than three percent of the traction surface of the tire.