

Safely



SPEAKING

BY RICK HEIDMAN

Winter driving

It is time once again for us to remind ourselves about the safe operation of vehicles in winter conditions. We all know that we need to increase following distance and reduce our speed when driving in winter. A good defensive driver will still be able to: *recognize the hazard, know the defense, and act in time* no matter what type of hazard is presented. Here are some winter driving issues to review.

Tire pressure

Are your vehicles equipped correctly to drive safely in winter? Tires are one of the most critical components of your vehicle safety and proper tire inflation is critical to control your vehicle in adverse conditions. With improper tire pressure your vehicle won't accelerate, brake or steer correctly. Ensure that your tires are inflated correctly and check them at least once per month. Use a good quality gauge to measure the pressure of your tires because even if a tire looks like it is inflated properly it can be up to 20 percent under inflated. Antilock braking systems, traction control systems, and stability control systems also might be compromised with incorrect tire inflation. Improper inflation increases resistance, which reduces tread life and fuel efficiency and increases the chance of a sudden tire failure.

Nitrogen vs. air

It is calculated that for every 10 percent a tire is under inflated it uses 2 percent more fuel. There are many reasons to switch to nitrogen from air. One of the main benefits of nitrogen is maintaining correct tire pressure, which increases fuel efficiency and tire life and most importantly ensures the stability and control of the tire.

Nitrogen-filled tires keep their pressure longer than air. Nitrogen molecules are larger than oxygen molecules; therefore they permeate rubber at a slower rate, thus keeping tire pressure for longer periods. Air contains moisture; nitrogen does not. Moisture in your tires reduces the life as moisture causes rust and oxidation of the wheel and inner liner.

Filling with nitrogen costs very little compared to the savings in fuel and tire replacement. But most importantly in winter driving situations having the correct tire pressure will maximize your control of your vehicle.

Snow tires

Snow tires are identified by a peaked mountain symbol with a snowflake inside it. They have been designed for use in severe snow conditions. All-season tires provide good performance in most weather but are not designed for snow and ice covered roads. Installing four snow tires is recommended to ensure stability and maximize control of the vehicle.



Antilock Braking System

An Antilock Braking System (ABS) is designed to help maintain steering control and avoid skidding while braking. Contrary to popular belief, ABS does not shorten stopping distance for dry or wet roads. In other words, with ABS you require virtually the same stopping distance as conventional braking systems. In fact, for slush and snow covered roads you should allow a longer stopping distance with ABS because a rotating tire will float on top of the slush or snow and require a longer stopping distance.

Take a pre-winter look at your fleet to ensure both your vehicles and drivers are prepared to drive. Dedicate an entire safety meeting to safe driving in winter. ■

The information provided here is intended to be general in nature. The advice of independent legal or other business advisors should be obtained in developing forms and procedures for your business. These recommendations are designed to reduce the risk of loss, but should not be construed as eliminating any risk or loss.

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