

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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Introduction

The Highways Agency is responsible for England's motorways and trunk roads.

This guide is to help you with your journey in severe weather, especially as it gets worse over winter. Inside, one of our Traffic Officers, Eris Robertson, tells you what he sees on our roads and gives his tips for getting you through bad weather safely.

We're doing our bit too. In winter we keep our roads as clear of ice and snow as we can to help you get to your destination safely. You'll see our salt spreaders and snow ploughs out on the roads whenever freezing temperatures are forecast.

But severe weather is not just about snow and ice. It includes strong winds and floods too. So we work closely with the Met Office throughout the year so we've got the latest information on weather conditions on our roads. That way we can warn you well in advance of any severe weather that might be approaching.

So, make sure you listen out for weather warnings and be prepared to change or delay your journey depending on advice being given.

We recommend that you always check your route before you set out. Our **website www.highways.gov.uk** provides real-time traffic information on our routes.

Patrolling the roads

Our Traffic Officers patrol England's motorways 24-hours a day, seven days a week. They deal with a number of incidents that could often be made much less stressful with a bit of planning.



Eris Robertson, a Traffic Officer from our Eastern Region, says:

“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 conditions before you leave. Listen to travel and weather news so you know what to expect.

In really bad conditions, think about whether you really need to travel at all, even if you are only going on a short, familiar journey. And make sure your vehicle's in good running order before you leave.



Check your vehicle

Eris suggests you carry out the following checks regularly:

- Get your vehicle serviced. That way you know it won't let you down even if the weather does
- Keep the cold out of your vehicle by checking and replacing the anti-freeze in the radiator
- Most batteries last between two and four years. Make sure yours is fully charged and replace it if you're not sure it's reliable
- Lights can get filthy with all the spray in winter weather. Keeping them clean and checking the bulbs regularly means you'll be more prepared for lower visibility and shorter days



- Getting a better grip on the road takes more tyre tread in wet or icy conditions. Ensure your tyres are inflated to the manufacturers' recommended pressure and have at least 3mm of tread depth

- Make sure your wiper blades aren't worn so you can keep your windscreen as clean as possible for the extra spray, ice and rain you get in winter
- Dirty windows and mirrors can make it hard to see as the low winter sun hits. Make sure you keep them clean and free of ice and snow in colder weather. And it goes without saying that your windows are clear and de-misted before you set off!
- Finally, don't forget to take a map with you for any unplanned diversions

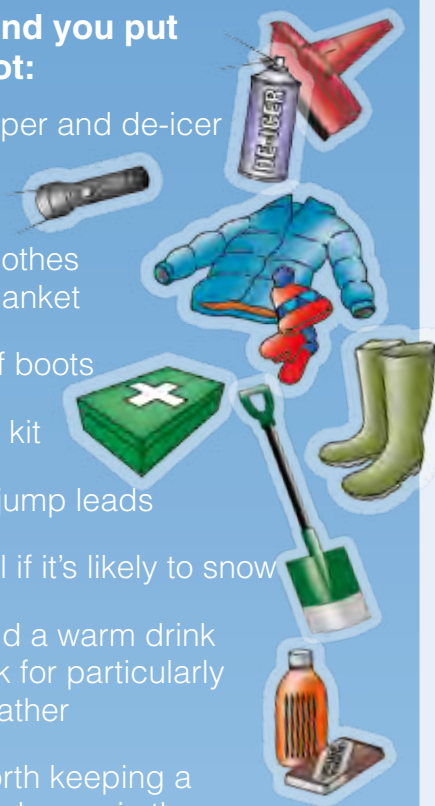


Take an emergency kit

Eris also suggests putting an emergency kit in the boot. *“Even if the weather doesn't seem that bad when you leave home, standing on the hard shoulder of the motorway can be another story. I once came across someone who had broken down on the motorway wearing flip-flops and shorts in February!”*

Here's what we recommend you put in the boot:

- Ice scraper and de-icer
- Torch
- Warm clothes and a blanket
- A pair of boots
- First-aid kit
- Battery jump leads
- A shovel if it's likely to snow
- Food and a warm drink in a flask for particularly cold weather

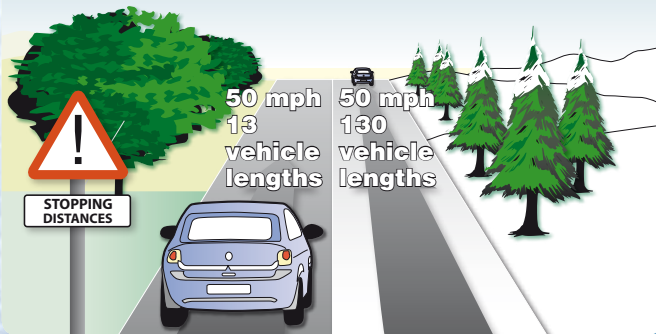


It's also worth keeping a pair of sunglasses in the glove box to protect from the glare from low winter sun.

3 Change the way you drive:

“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.”

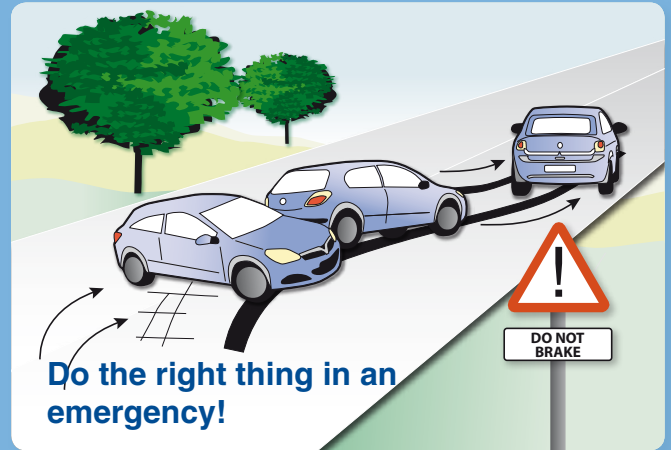
Stopping distances in winter



Dry road

Slippery road

- When roads are slippery it will take longer to stop. **Up to 10 times longer.**
- So, drop your speed, and give yourself more time to slow down and stop.
- Drive with care even if roads have been treated.



If your vehicle starts to skid:

- Depress the clutch. Do not brake!
- Turn the steering wheel into the direction of the skid.
- When the vehicle straightens, steer along the road.

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 on. Switch them off once conditions have improved so they don't dazzle drivers behind you.
- 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

- Check for snow on the roof of the vehicle before you drive off. It can slip down over the windscreen and obscure your view.
- If your tyres are making virtually no noise this could be a sign you're driving on ice.
- If your vehicle skids depress the clutch and turn the steering wheel into the direction of the skid. When the vehicle straightens steer along the road. Don't brake – it will just lock up your wheels and you'll skid further.

Driving in the rain

- When the road's wet, it can take up to twice as long to stop so it makes sense to slow down when it's raining.
- 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

- In very windy weather we advise you to 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 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 and high-sided vehicles.



Floods

- If you can avoid it, it's best not to drive through lying surface water as you might flood your engine. The deepest water is usually nearest the kerb.
- If you do have to drive through flooded roads, use first gear. Move forward immediately to avoid stalling the engine. Keep your revs high and slip your clutch when you need to.
- Test your brakes after passing through the water. If they work then you can drive on at your usual speed providing it's safe to do so.



In freezing conditions, look out for vehicles spreading salt, & snow ploughs

Make sure you watch out for our salt spreaders in winter. They'll indicate they are spreading salt by flashing amber beacons and will drive at less than 40mph. Don't overtake these vehicles unless it is safe.

The same goes for snow ploughs. Flashing amber beacons mean they are likely to be clearing snow. Don't overtake them unless the lane you intend to use has been cleared. If you're following any of these vehicles it's better to keep well back because snow or salt is thrown across the width of the road.

Breaking 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 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.

More information to help you on your journey

- Highways Agency Traffic Officers have powers to stop vehicles on most motorways and some 'A' class roads, in England only. If Highways Agency Traffic Officers, in uniform, want to stop your vehicle on safety grounds they will try to



attract your attention by flashing amber lights, usually from behind directing you to pull over to the side by pointing and/or using the left indicator. You **MUST** then pull over and stop as soon as it is safe to do so. Then switch off your engine. It is an offence not to comply with their directions.

- 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 **08457 50 40 30**.

- You can also listen to Traffic Radio available on Digital Radio or via the internet on **www.trafficradio.org.uk** or listen to local radio for up-to-date travel bulletins.
- For information on weather conditions, consult the Met Office website at **www.metoffice.gov.uk** or listen to local radio broadcasts.



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Got a question or comment?

08457 50 40 30*

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 BT landlines to 0845 numbers will cost no more than 4p per minute and to 0870 numbers no more than 8p per minute, mobile calls usually cost more.

Safe driving at roadworks



During 2006 two workers were killed and 19 seriously injured in the course of their work on Highways Agency roads.

For the safety of all road users and roadworkers, 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.

Remember that tiredness can kill. Take regular breaks from driving.

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