

Winter Vehicle Safety Tips

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We all know it, winter is coming. Proper winter car preparation can prevent a breakdown or even an accident. Here are some tips suggested by auto experts to best prepare your vehicle for winter, and some winter driving tips to stay safe as you drive in Minnesota.

Pack an emergency winter supply kit to keep in your vehicle with the following items: cell phone charger, first aid kit, jumper cables, water/snacks, flashlight, boots/mittens/hat, blanket, shovel, ice scraper, a red bandanna or cloth, and a bag of gritty sand or kitty litter.

Weak battery strength or cable corrosion could leave you stranded on a cold winter morning. Check your vehicle battery and have it replaced now if necessary.

It's dangerous enough to drive in icy or snowy weather conditions; ensure your tires have plenty of tread left to give you more traction and help keep you safe by providing better control on snowy, slushy roads. To monitor your tires' tread depth, you can buy a tread-depth gauge, or have your mechanic check the tread depth. Certainly when any tire groove is at 2/32 of an inch, it's worn out and should be replaced immediately.

If your tires still have a good amount of tread, make sure to have the tires with the best tread on the back to help avoid spinouts. Tire pressure can also be an issue during winter, tires tend to deflate once the temperature drops below 32 degrees. Keeping your tires properly inflated will give you better control of the car in all conditions and can help you save on fuel costs.

This is also a good time to have your brakes inspected, and replace your brake and windshield washer fluids with formulas made for winter. Other types of windshield washer fluid can freeze up in cold weather. Inspect your wiper blades before winter too and replace them if needed to ensure you have the best visibility on a snowy day.

Once your vehicle is ready for winter driving, follow these tips to stay safe as you venture out. Be aware of weather forecasts and road reports before traveling. Download the Minnesota Department of Transportation 511 app on your smart phone to see road and traffic conditions throughout Minnesota; you can also search online at 511mn.org, or dial 5-1-1 on your phone to access this information. Dress appropriately and allow extra time if you must travel in severe weather. Tell someone where you are going and what route you will take. Slowing down before turns and intersections and increasing the distance between you and the car ahead of you can help avoid collisions and skid outs.

If you do stall or get stuck, tie a red bandana on your antenna or hang it out your vehicle window to alert road crews you need assistance. Stay in your vehicle, it's a good shelter in a storm. Don't run your engine while stranded unless you are sure the exhaust pipe is free of snow; a plugged exhaust system can cause deadly carbon monoxide gas to enter your vehicle.