

Winter Driving Safety

Arizona's winter season brings snow to the high country and floods throughout the state. Many rural and U.S. Forest Service roads also endure severe conditions that require seasonal closures. There are steps you can take now to be prepared for the severe weather conditions that can occur during the winter season.

Prepare your vehicle:

- Install good winter tires and make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually efficient for most winter conditions. However, some jurisdictions require that vehicles must be equipped with chains or snow tires with studs.
- Keep a windshield scraper and a small broom in your car for ice and snow removal.
- Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season.
- Plan long trips carefully.
- Always travel during daylight, and if possible, take at least one other person.
- If you must go out during a winter storm, use public transportation.
- Dress warmly. Wear layers of loose-fitting lightweight clothing.
- Carry food and water.
- Take your cell phone or a two-way radio. Keep the batteries charged.
- Let someone know your destination, your route and your arrival time.
- Call 5-1-1 or go to [AZ511](#) for the latest road conditions around Arizona.

Keep a winter **disaster kit** in your car at all times that includes:

- Flashlight with extra batteries
- First Aid kit with pocket knife
- Necessary medications
- Several blankets
- Sleeping bags
- Extra newspapers for insulation
- Plastic bags for sanitation
- Matches
- Extra sets of mittens, socks and wool caps
- Rain gear and extra clothes
- Small sack of sand for generating traction under the wheels
- Small shovel
- Small tools (pliers, wrench and screwdriver)
- Jumper cables
- Set of tire chains or traction mats
- Cards, games and puzzles
- Brightly colored cloth to use as a flag
- Non-perishable high-energy food/snacks
- Non-electric can opener
- Bottled water

If you get **trapped in your car** during a blizzard:

- Stay in your car. Do not leave the car to search for assistance unless help is visible within 100 yards. You may become disoriented and lost in blowing and drifting snow.
- Display a trouble sign. Hang a brightly colored cloth on the radio antenna and raise the hood.
- Occasionally run the engine to keep warm. Turn on the engine for about 10 minutes each hour. Run the heater when the car is running and turn on the car's dome light.
- Beware of carbon monoxide poisoning. Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow and slightly open a downwind window for ventilation.
- Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Do minor exercises to keep up your circulation. Clap your hands and move your arms and legs occasionally. Try not to stay in one position for too long. If more than one person is in the car, take turns sleeping.

- Huddle together for warmth. Use newspapers, maps and even the removable car mats for added insulation.
- Avoid overexertion. Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart. Unaccustomed exercise such as shoveling snow or pushing a car can bring on a heart attack or make other medical conditions worse.
- Avoid dehydration. Have a supply of bottled water in the car.

Everyday winter driving tips:

- Take your time and be patient. Allow extra time to get to your destination.
- If you have ABS braking on your vehicle on all four wheels, you will still be able to steer around negotiated hazards if the brakes are locked up. If you don't have ABS braking and lock up your brakes, your vehicle will not respond to steering input and will continue going straight.
- Always accelerate slowly to get the best traction on ice and snow.
- Do not turn abruptly: turn slowly and gradually, especially when changing lanes.
- Increase the distance between you and traffic ahead. Allow yourself plenty of time to brake, and steer around any upcoming hazards. Stopping distances increase greatly when roads are wet and icy.
- Posted speed limits are set for normal road and driving conditions. When the roadway is wet, icy or snow packed, road conditions are no longer normal and drivers need to adjust their speed (slow down).
- Black ice is usually hard to see. If all of a sudden the sound of your vehicle on the roadway gets quiet, you are very likely on black ice. Beware of shaded areas on the roadway where ice may remain.
- Turn off high beam headlights in blowing or heavy snow and use the low beams.
- When traffic is stopped on the roadway, stop your vehicle in an area where emergency vehicles may still be able to drive around.
- Take time to properly defrost your all of your vehicle windows prior to driving.
- If you are involved in a collision, you must consider existing circumstances and decide to either remain in your vehicle or get out and move to a position of safety away from the roadway.
- Be aware of your location by watching for landmarks, signs for cities and towns, and milepost markers. This will help emergency personnel find you if you are involved in a collision.
- Watch out for snow plows. Give them plenty of room.
- Winter weather brings rainy driving conditions to many parts of the state, and driving conditions are similar to those during monsoon season. Be extra careful when driving in rain and snow.

(Sources: [National Weather Service](#), [American Red Cross, Grand Canyon Chapter](#); [Arizona Department of Transportation/5-1-1](#), [Coconino County Sheriff's Office](#), [Arizona Department of Public Safety](#))