Leader’s Notes - Winter Driving

The first snowstorm of the year brings an increase in the number of road accidents as people re-adjust to winter driving conditions. This safety talk gives a reminder of how to prepare, how to drive with control and what to do if you become stranded during the winter season.

Note: these notes are intended to guide the trainer through a crew safety meeting on winter driving. Review the slides and notes ahead of time. Gather any procedures, statistics, incident or accident reports available from your operation. Referring to these will make the subject more relevant to the audience.

Every year winter driving changes the rules of the road for an entire season, and every year it is important to get your car ready for the snow and ice and change a few driving habits to ensure your safety.

Getting your car ready for winter should start in the early fall. Have winter tires installed, replace summer wipers with winter wipers and switch over to cold-weather windshield washer fluid when the temperature starts to drop below zero.

To get ready to drive your car in winter conditions, make sure to remove all snow and ice to help increase visibility. Blowing snow and ice can create a hazard for other vehicles as it flies from yours. Keep your gas tank above half full. Your gas tank can become a valuable heat source if you find yourself stranded during the winter.
A winter survival kit is relatively easy to put together and can become invaluable if you become stranded. Flares will warn people of your location and help rescuers find you more easily. Extra clothing and food will help you stay warm while waiting for rescue.

Simply slowing down is one of the most important steps in safe winter driving. Braking on snow and ice requires much more distance than in dry conditions.

A typical following distance of two to three seconds should be doubled in poor driving conditions.

If the temperature drops suddenly over night, chances are so has the pressure in your tires. This reduces your traction in extremely cold conditions, making it harder to maintain control if you come across slippery conditions. Take the time to pump up your tires in cold snaps, it's well worth it.

While it is always reassuring to see the road salt truck go by - it's best not to have blind faith that the road is safe. Salt takes 10 to 20 minutes to take full effect and becomes less effective when temperatures drop below -10 Celsius.
Looking where you want to go and then steering in that direction is the most reliable way to get out of a skid. If you can, change gears to neutral or depress the clutch to decrease the forward deceleration of the car. This is worth practicing in an automatic transmission vehicle, as you do not want to accidentally put the vehicle in reverse.

Braking while in a skid will only increase the distance of a skid. However if your vehicle is equipped with an Anti-Lock Braking system you can brake and steer. Know your vehicle. Generally, if your vehicle is equipped with ABS, manufacturers’ specify firm braking while steering to the direction you want to go.

Accelerating while in a skid will cause you to lose further control of your vehicle.

Travelling long distances in the winter can often involve driving through several different weather systems. Check a regional forecast to make sure the weather is clear for your entire route.

Driving for a long time can lead to complacency and inattention. To keep focused, stop frequently, stretch, eat light meals and drive with a cooler air temperature. This will make your drive safer and more enjoyable.

Leaving your vehicle puts you at risk for cold illnesses such as hypothermia and frostbite. It also increases your chances of getting lost. It is far easier for rescuers to find a vehicle during a snow storm than a lone person.

Place flares and emergency lights around your vehicle to inform other vehicles and rescuers of your presence.

Dig your way out slowly. There is a chance you won’t be able to dig out and if you work up a heavy sweat shoveling, your body will cool down rapidly once you stop. If you can’t dig your vehicle out, clear around the tailpipe and return to your vehicle.
Getting Stuck or Stranded (cont’d)

- Run the engine for about ten minutes every hour to keep warm. Make sure a window is open (choose a window opposite from the wind)
- Put on warm clothing right away. Don’t wait to get cold to put on extra clothes, socks and toques
- Do simple stretches to increase circulation and maintain warmth
- Keep an eye out for rescuers

Once you’ve determined you can’t dig yourself out, access the clothing in your survival kit immediately. If you’ve worked up a sweat digging, remove any wet layers and change in to as many dry layers as you can.

Simple stretches while waiting will help keep you warm. The candle from the survival kit will help keep you warm. Placing in the candle in a small can will add a great deal of stability to the candle.

Other Safety Meeting topics and packages are available from WSN and include:

- Blasting Contaminants
- Fall Protection
- I Scale for Safety
- Lockout for Life
- Remote Control Operation of LHD’s
- Ultraviolet Hazards
- Conveyor Belt Safety
- Heat Stress
- IRS: Who’s Responsible
- Planned Workplace Inspections
- Pedestrian Safety Underground
- Zero Energy State