

Winter Safety in New Mexico, elsewhere

Presented by
150th FW Safety Office

New Mexico weather during the winter is mild compared to other regions in the country.

The leading cause of death during winter storms is transportation accidents. Preparing your vehicle for the winter season and knowing how to react if stranded or lost on the road are the keys to safe winter driving.

Before you travel, have a mechanic check the following items on your car:

- **Battery**
- **Antifreeze**
- **Wipers and windshield washer fluid**
- **Ignition system**
- **Thermostat**
- **Lights**
- **Flashing hazard lights**
- **Exhaust system**
- **Heater**
- **Brakes**
- **Defroster**
- **Oil level (if necessary, replace existing oil with a winter grade oil or the SAE 10w/30 weight variety)**

Install good winter tires or check to make sure they are good. Make sure the tires have adequate tread. All-weather radials are usually adequate for most winter conditions. However, some jurisdictions require that to drive on their roads, vehicles must be equipped with chains or snow tires with studs.

Keep a windshield scraper and small broom for ice and snow removal. Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season. Plan long trips carefully.

Listen to the radio or call the state highway patrol for the latest road conditions. —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 and wear layers of loose-fitting, layered, lightweight clothing. Carry food and water. Store a supply of high energy “munchies” and several bottles of water. Contact your local emergency management office or American Red

Cross chapter for more information on winter driving.

It is always a good idea to keep certain items in your vehicle(s). The following is a good checklist to use:

- **Flashlights 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 set of mittens, socks, and a wool cap**
- **Rain gear and extra clothes**
- **Small sack of sand for generating traction under wheels**
- **Small shovel**
- **Small tools (pliers, wrench, screwdriver)**
- **Booster cables**
- **Set of tire chains or traction mats**
- **Cards, games, and puzzles**
- **Brightly colored cloth to use as a flag**
- **Canned fruit and nuts**
- **Nonelectric can opener**
- **Bottled water**

If you ever get trapped in a vehicle during a blizzard, remember to stay in the 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 engine to keep warm. Turn on the car’s engine for about 10 minutes each hour. Run the heater when the car is running. Also, turn on the car’s dome light when the car is running. Most importantly, beware of carbon monoxide poisoning. Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow, and open a downwind window slightly for ventilation.

Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia. You can do minor exercises to keep up circulation like clapping your hands and moving 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.

For warmth, huddle together. Use newspapers, maps, and even the removable car mats for added insulation. Avoid overexertion. The 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. Be aware of symptoms of dehydration.

Wind Chill

Wind chill is a calculation of how cold it feels outside when the effects of temperature and wind speed are combined. A strong wind combined with a temperature of just below freezing can have the same effect as a still air temperature about 35 degrees colder.

Winter Storm Watches and Warnings

A winter storm watch indicates that severe winter weather may affect your area. A winter storm warning indicates that severe winter weather conditions are definitely on the way. A blizzard warning means that large amounts of falling or blowing snow and sustained winds of at least 35 miles per hour are expected for several hours.

Frostbite and Hypothermia

Frostbite is a severe reaction to cold exposure that can permanently damage its victims. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, or nose and ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite.

Hypothermia is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion.

If frostbite or hypothermia is suspected, begin warming the person slowly and seek immediate medical assistance. Warm the person’s trunk first. Use your own body heat to help. Arms and legs should be warmed last because stimulation of the limbs can drive cold blood toward the heart and lead to heart failure.

For more information about winter weather contact the 150th FW Safety Office at 6-6715.