

Reciprocal News

Helping to Manage Your Risk

The MEARIE Group's Reciprocal Newsletter

A publication designed for the benefit of Ontario's Electricity Industry.

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Getting Vehicles Ready for Another Long Winter

Are your vehicles, both company and personal, ready for yet another onslaught of winter? Are you only hoping your vehicle can make it through the winter or do you know it will? The stress and strains on vehicles increases greatly during the winter months and minor deficiencies can turn into major problems. So if you haven't already, now is the time to take precautions before the temperature drops dramatically.

Batteries

Cold weather can be hard on batteries. Therefore checking vehicle batteries should be at the top of the winterizing "to do list". Check the connections, making sure they are tight and corrosion free and the cables are not loose. Perform a load test to determine the condition of the battery and replace if necessary. A battery loses almost one third of its starting power at 0° celsius and drastically reduces from there. A strong battery is vital for winter conditions.

Fluids

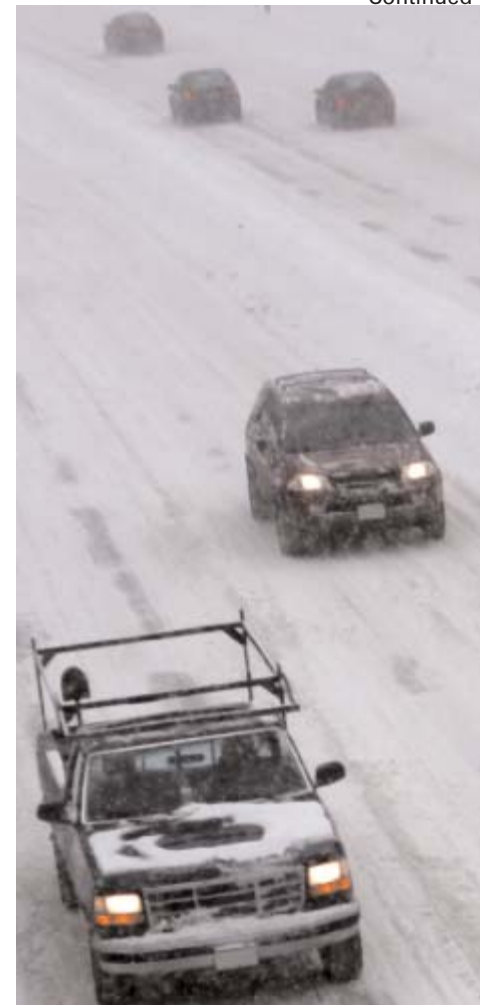
Is the right grade of oil being used? Some vehicles require a lighter weight or lower viscosity oil for winter conditions. Consult the vehicle manual for appropriate details. Check the engine coolant. Is the anti-freeze adequate for the lowest

temperatures in your area? When was the last time the radiator was checked or flushed? Is the washer fluid and gas line anti-freeze winter grade?

Visibility

As mentioned above, washer fluid should be winter grade and kept topped up. Do the wiper blades clean the window streak free in

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three swipes? If not, it is time to replace the blades. Consider installing winter blades with a rubber cover over the metal arms to keep them from icing up. Check the front and rear defroster to ensure they operate and clear the windows.

Inspect headlights, tail lights, signal lights and brake lights to ensure they are clean and in working order. "See and be seen" is the adage to remember.

Brakes, Belts and Hoses

Top up brake fluid, clutch fluid and transmission fluid. Squeeze hoses and push/pull on engine belts to check the condition. Belts and hoses tend to deteriorate over time. If a belt can be pushed more than one inch under finger pressure, adjustment may be required. Also check hoses for loose connections, unusual bulges, cracks, tears and holes.

Tires

Tire pressure and tread depth can affect traction in snow and rain. Check the tire pressure on a regular basis as colder temperatures will cause the pressure to reduce. Tire pressure will change about 1 psi [7 kPa] or every 5.5° C change in temperature. In Ontario where seasonal temperature changes can range from +30°C to -30°C, the 60 degree temperature swing can result in a tire pressure change of 6 psi [42 kPa]. This can sacrifice tire performance, tread wear and potentially driving safety.

In addition to tire pressure, the tire type can have an effect on winter mobility and safety. Tread depth is critical in controlling a vehicle, especially in snow or heavy rain. Inspect tire tread for wear and adequate depth. Changing to winter tires with high-tech, cold insensitive

rubber compounds and tread design can also be of benefit.

Tune Up

Is it time for a tune up, including inspection of spark plugs, ignition coil, fuel-injection, emission control equipment, brake linings or pads. All of these should be checked and serviced to provide the best safety and serviceability in winter. Spraying a lubricant such as WD-40 in all locks will help to prevent freezing.

Ready for Trouble

Are your communication systems ready? Are cell phones and radios fully charged? Is the GPS vehicle tracking system functioning in case of an emergency? Is there a winter emergency kit in the vehicle? The kit should include [depending on the type and size of vehicle] flashlight, flares, first aid kit, blanket, water

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proof matches, candle, gloves, hat, paper towels, snow shovel, snow brush, ice scraper, washer fluid and high energy food.

Driving in the winter like an expert

Experts agree the three main factors to keep in mind for winter driving are visibility, traction and driving style. Reduced visibility and reduced traction are the primary factors that make winter driving more difficult and challenging. However, it is the driving style drivers adopt that will determine how well drivers cope with winter hazards and other drivers.

Many Facets of visibility

Coping with winter visibility begins before you even enter the vehicle. The driver must allow enough time to properly clear all windows of snow, ice and frost both inside and outside vehicle. Do not forget the mirrors and wipers. Break off any accumulated ice or snow on the blades and wipe them clean. Make sure that washer fluid nozzles are clean, free of ice and working properly.

A metal edged ice scraper works the best, however a metal paint scraper with a strong short blade is a good substitute. A credit card sized pocket

scraper or a credit card works well on interior windows to remove frost. Remove snow from headlights and tail lights or brake lights. Remove snow from hood and heater air inlets to reduce interior frosting. [snow vaporizes as it passes through the warming heater - core, saturating the interior air and then reforming as frost on the interior windows] Do not drive with the heater on "Recirculation" mode as this only re-circulates the interior air; increasing humidity from the melting snow you brought into the vehicle with you.

Traction

The key to maximizing vehicle control on slippery surfaces may be summed up in one word - smoothness. Traction is just another word for friction. Traction is reduced when one of the surfaces is moving with respect to the other. For maximum traction it is imperative to avoid wheel spin or sliding. With reduced levels of traction on snow or ice, any quick force input to the tires can cause loss of control. For example harsh movement of steering wheel, quick application of accelerator or brake pedal.

Therefore when accelerating, don't

stomp on the accelerator, always tap it gently as if there were an egg between your foot and the pedal. The first few millimeters of pedal travel are critical. Once the vehicle is rolling you may increase the pressure on the pedal increasing the rate of acceleration.

Brake before you turn into a corner, steer through the corner at a safe speed and then accelerate again when you straighten out. Conscientiously apply these smoothness techniques and it will substantially reduce winter driving risks.

Remember to prepare your vehicles for the conditions ahead. Adjust your driving to the weather conditions. Allow extra time and reduce the potential for winter problems.

If you would like to further discuss Winter Driving please contact The MEARIE Group, Gary Durie, Risk Analyst at (905) 265-5355 or gdurie@mearie.ca.

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