



Safety Tips for Winter Automobile Travelers

When winter arrives, so does the possibility of winter storms. University of Georgia Cooperative Extension specialists say prepare your vehicle now for cold winter weather.

Check your vehicle annually

Have a certified mechanic winterize your vehicle. This should include a check of the following:

- ignition system
- battery
- lights
- tires
- cooling system
- fuel systems
- exhaust system
- heater
- brakes
- wiper blades
- defroster
- tire chains and tow chains
- antifreeze
- winter-grade oil

If you must travel roads during a winter storm, be sure to tell someone which route you will take and when to expect you at your final destination.

Always select an alternate route before you leave in case your preferred route isn't passable. As you travel, listen to the radio for the latest weather information.

Try not to travel alone during a storm. Travel with someone when ever possible and travel in a caravan if possible.

Always fill your gas tank before entering open country, even for short distances. You will be less likely to be stranded from running out of gas. In case you are stranded by the storm, you will have enough fuel to run the motor and heat the car.

Pack a winter storm car kit

This kit should include the following items:

- Blankets or sleeping bags to keep you warm, or a box of newspaper to use as insulation
- matches and candles for light
- an empty coffee can with plastic cover to use as a toilet
- facial tissues and paper towels
- extra clothing, especially caps, mitten and overshoes
- high-calorie, non-perishable food
- compass and road maps
- knife
- first aid kit
- shovel
- sack of sand
- flashlight or signal light with extra batteries
- windshield scraper
- booster cables
- two tow chains
- fire extinguisher
- catalytic heater
- axe
- plastic scraper
- transistor radio with extra battery
- tools - pliers, screwdriver, adjustable wrench, flares

What to do if you are trapped in a storm

If you are trapped by a severe storm, avoid overexertion and overexposure. Strenuous acts like pushing your car or shoveling snow can cause a heart attack in cold weather conditions.

Stay in your car where you are sheltered and more likely to be found. You can become quickly disoriented when trying to walk around in sleet or snow.

Stay calm and keep fresh air in your car. Freezing wet and wind-driven snow can seal the passenger compartment and suffocate you. Keep the downwind window open about an inch when you run the motor and heater. Make sure snow has not blocked the exhaust pipe.

Exercise from time to time by clapping hands and moving arms and legs vigorously. Don't stay in one position long.

Keep the dome light on at night to make the car visible to rescue crews. Have one person keep watch. Don't allow everyone in the car to sleep at once.

In a severe storm, automobile parts can be used as emergency tools. A hubcap or sun visor can be used as a shovel. Seat covers can serve as blankets.

Floor mats will help shut out wind and cold. Place them against windows on the upwind side to help reduce drafts.

Engine oil burned in a hubcap creates a smoke signal visible for miles. To light the oil, prime with a little gasoline, or use paper for starter fuel.

Use your car's horn as a rescue signal. An automobile horn can be heard for as far as a mile downwind.