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Winter Driving and Survival Tips

Facts

- Traffic crashes claimed 559 lives in Minnesota in 2005. In addition to the basic safe driving habits we practice all year long — buckling up, driving alert and sober, and driving at a safe and legal speed — there are special precautions that need to be followed during the winter months.

Safe Behavior

- Make sure your car is ready for the season. Throughout the winter, keep your gas tank at least half full to avoid gas line freeze.
- Avoid traveling (especially alone) if severe weather is threatening. Before taking a trip, tell someone at your destination of your expected arrival time and your travel route. Stock your car with basic winter driving equipment: a scraper and brush, small shovel, jumper cables, tow chain and a bag of sand or cat litter for tire traction. Also include road flares, a blanket, heavy boots, warm clothing and a flashlight with batteries. Keep an emergency survival kit in the car, including high-energy food such as a chocolate bar or energy bar.
- If your car has been outside during a snowfall, brush all the snow off before starting out. Snow left on the front hood will blow into the front vent and cause defrosting problems. It can also melt and re-freeze on the windshield. Snow on the roof will cover the rear window and snow on the trunk will blow onto tail lights. Pay particular attention to cleaning off headlights and tail lights so that other motorists can see you.
- Adjust your speed to road conditions and increase following distance. Remember that bridges and overpasses can be more slippery than other parts of the road. If you begin to skid, remain calm, ease your foot off the gas and turn your wheels in the direction you want the front of the car to go. If you have an anti-lock braking system (ABS) apply a steady firm pressure to the brake pedal. Never pump ABS brakes.

- If you find yourself stranded, stay calm and stay put. Staying in your car will decrease your risk of frostbite or hypothermia and increase your chances of being rescued. Run your engine for heat about once an hour — every half hour in extreme cold. Make sure your exhaust pipe is clear to prevent carbon monoxide from getting into the car. Leave one window slightly open. Tie a piece of brightly colored cloth to your antenna to alert others and aid rescuers. Limit your sleep to short naps.
- Consider taking a cell phone with you for use during emergencies. On long trips, be sure the batteries are fully charged and consider bringing a spare battery. Keep the phone and batteries warm to avoid quick power drain. Driving requires your full attention; find a safe place to pull off the road when you need to make a call.

Additional Materials

- For more information about safe driving and survival kits contact the Minnesota Safety Council at 651-291-9150 or 800-444-9150, or the American Red Cross, Twin Cities Chapter at 612-871-7676.

Contact

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