



Defensive Driving – Adverse Conditions

Improving awareness about how inclement weather impacts the decisions drivers make.



Drivers must develop skills and judgment necessary to keep their own vehicle safely under control during adverse conditions.

Defensive driving is the act of driving to prevent accidents in spite of the incorrect actions of others or adverse driving conditions, such as weather, traffic, lighting, vehicle or road condition, or the driver's physical or mental state. The defensive driver assumes that other drivers may make mistakes and is on guard in the event an error is made.

Inclement weather conditions on the roads create driving hazards that require extra attention. Inclement driving conditions impact ALL vehicles on the road, including tractor-trailers, trucks, service vehicles, and automobiles. Your safety program should include defensive driver training on the proper way to drive in adverse conditions and should include all employees who operate a company vehicle regardless of the type of vehicle.

Failure to adjust to adverse conditions is a major factor in accident causation. The adverse conditions most frequently encountered result in reduced traction and reduced visibility. Conditions that reduce traction include rain, snow, ice, slush, and gravel. Reduced visibility conditions include twilight, darkness, rain, snow, and fog.

Drivers must develop skills and judgment necessary to keep their own vehicle safely under control during adverse conditions as well as be able to anticipate errors other drivers make during such poor driving conditions. Reducing vehicle speed to increase traction is a key precaution. It also provides more time for drivers to respond to the unexpected.

The following are management areas that should be addressed regarding defensive driving and tips for your employees that will help them become better defensive drivers.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES	YES	NO
Have employees been trained to safely drive on slippery surfaces and under reduced visibility conditions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a safe off-road area available for practicing vehicle handling on slippery surfaces?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do your tractor-trailer drivers know what causes jackknifing and how to prevent it?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does management/dispatch consider the potential effect of inclement weather?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are snow brushes, ice scrapers, and tire chains provided when operating in areas that warrant their use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do your employees operate vehicles safely on slippery surfaces and under reduced visibility conditions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you periodically have qualified personnel ride with your drivers to assess their driving habits?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do employees properly adjust mirrors and perform a pre-trip inspection to assure that all lights are functioning properly, tires have sufficient tread and pressure, windshield wipers function and washer fluid is available, and that tire chains, snow brushes, & ice scrapers are available when necessary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are employees aware of the concept of a 'preventable accident' (A preventable accident is one in which the driver failed to exercise every reasonable precaution to prevent the accident. This is irrespective of the extent of property damage and/or personal injury, to whom it occurred or the location of the accident.)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SAFE OPERATOR TIPS

Being acutely aware of the weather conditions and forecast can prevent unexpected circumstances and make for a safer trip. However, adverse weather conditions are often unexpected by drivers and dispatchers prior to the start of a trip. Much like road closures due to accidents, dispatchers and drivers may need to reevaluate expected arrival times to account for adverse weather conditions and safe operations.

All persons operating a motor vehicle need to be prepared to make quick decisions when confronted with snow, ice, and other forms of wintery weather. It's important to be constantly aware of your surroundings, the weather, and the flow of traffic. Practicing caution at all times, even when traveling at low speeds on city streets, can prevent property damage and injury.

To be an effective defensive driver in adverse weather conditions, your employees should:

- **Slow down.** Increase following distance (double or triple) to avoid a rear-end collision if another driver in front of you brakes hard. Skidding becomes more likely at increased speeds, especially on icy or wet roads. Remember, professional drivers can drive additional hours when adverse weather conditions are encountered.
- **Remove ice and snow from your vehicle.** Keep headlights, taillights, mirrors, windows, roof, and windshield clean. Do not allow ice and snow to create additional blind spots on your vehicle.
- **Use emergency flashers** as necessary.
- **Apply brakes gently and steer without jerky movements.** Likewise, start out slowly to get a feel for the road.
- **Use caution on bridges and overpasses** as they tend to freeze before other road surfaces.
- **Watch for black ice**, which often forms in shady areas and under bridges/overpasses.
- **Be extremely cautious when running empty**, bobtailing, or when operating a rear-wheel driven vehicle in slippery conditions. Lightly loaded wheels lock up easily during braking and this induces skidding/jackknifing.
- **Beware of traveling too slowly on slick, banked curves.** The vehicle might slide sideways into traffic or slide off the road.
- **Be prepared to get off the road** and wait for conditions to improve.

Increase following distance (double or triple) to avoid a rear-end collision if another driver in front of you brakes hard.





Make the right choice
and drive safe. If we all work
together, everyone can arrive at
their destination safely.

Adverse weather conditions bring a lot of special challenges and potential danger. Less skilled drivers find themselves in accidents and breakdowns that could have been prevented had safe habits been in place. Although adverse weather driving conditions can be dangerous, following the tips in this article can greatly reduce chances of being involved in a collision.

Make the right choice and drive safe. If we all work together, everyone can arrive at their destination safely.

REFERENCES

- Defensive Driving – Commercial Motor Vehicle Drivers; Verisk and Iso Products Online – Engineering and Safety Service; November 2020 <https://www.verisk.com/insurance/products/engineering-safety-service>
- Resources for Drivers; Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Website; November 2020 <https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov>

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