

Winter Weather Driving Tips

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

We are now officially into winter. Sure, we've already had a little taste of winter with snow and slick roads, and we've seem to have been blessed with an amazing amount of cloudy and foggy weather, but let's face it, we could easily have this kind of weather for another three months. Based on what I've seen so far, I think a lot of folks need a refresher course on winter driving tips!

First and foremost, slow down and avoid any fast actions or reactions. I remember a drivers education teacher talk about when driving on snow or ice always drive like there was an egg between your foot and the pedals. You want to drive in such a way that you never break the egg. With front wheel and four wheel drive vehicles, antilock braking systems and traction control, far too many drivers think that they can get on slick roads and drive like normal. While all of the above can help you maintain control, they are dependent on you using some common sense.

It doesn't matter what kind of vehicle you drive and how much technology you have working, if the coefficient of friction between your tires and the road surface equals zero (which means your sliding) then you are in a giant toboggan and all you can do is hang on! Be aware that if it is snowing or raining in the winter time, ice and slick surfaces will occur. You can not drive like normal. Slow down, allow extra distance between vehicles and extra time for traveling.

Something that I saw a lot of in the most recent snows and inclement weather was the number of people driving without lights on. I've got a brother who is convinced that headlights are to help him see the road. The concept of having your lights on so you can be seen is totally foreign to him! Driving lights are okay, but your tail lights don't normally come on with driving lights. Parking lights are to be used when you are parked, they are not an alternative to headlights. I want people to see that I'm on the road. Even if you have automatic on headlights, if it's snowing (or raining or foggy or even heavy overcast) turn on your headlights! Remember that Kansas law states that if you have to run your windshield wipers, your headlights have to be turned on!

If you are taking a trip in the winter, always be prepared for inclement weather. There's lots of information on the internet about emergency safety kits for winter travel. Have one in your car if you travel regularly in winter weather. Winter storms can come up on you in a hurry and even a simple drive of a few miles can become treacherous and leave you stranded. If the storm is bad, it literally could be 24 hours or longer before help can get to you and your car's fuel supply probably won't last that long. Be prepared and you will survive!

Lastly, be aware of the weather around you. In this era of satellite television and radio it can become very easy to be weather unaware. Listen to local news at least once a day. Use a weather app on your smart phone, tablet or computer. They'll alert you if there is a weather advisory. If severe weather is imminent, simply don't travel. Sure, the worst part of the storm may miss you, but simply stay off the road and you'll avoid problems!

Even in a mild winter we will have some adverse driving conditions. Be prepared, be cautious and drive defensively and safely so you can make it through the winter without a problem!