

Changing to Winter Habits

True Story... In a rush to get out the door and to work on time, my friend grabbed her jacket off the back of a chair, tucked her purse under her arm and headed out the door. When she stepped outside, she nearly fell from slipping on the thin sheet of ice that had formed on the cement porch. "Might be a bit nasty, today" she thought to herself. She started her SUV, scraped the ice off her windshield, and headed to work. Absently thinking of what was on her work calendar for the day. She took the drive to work slower, (note... not slow, but *slower*). As she came on the ramp to interstate, she fishtailed and realized that not ALL parts of the roadway had been treated. She drove a few miles and noticed at the off-ramp that there seemed to be something wrong with one of her tires. She pulled off to a safe location only to notice that her back tire was flat, with the freezing rain still coming down. No fear, though, as she has travel insurance and can call for someone to help her so that she doesn't have to ruin her dress pants changing the tire herself. The wrecker arrived and when she stepped out of her care she realized that her jacket and bare hands were not going to keep her warm as she stood in the freezing rain. In her rush to get to work, it seems she missed all of the blatant clues that she needed to be ready for winter driving conditions. Perhaps you can relate with me friend. I can because that "friend" was ME.

Since I live on a farm, I have commuted to work all of my adult life and I know what I should do to prepare my vehicle for cold-weather travel. However, it seems that this year, the icy weather arrived before I was prepared for it. If you haven't taken the preparations for winter travel, I invite you to join me in making sure both you and your car are "winterized."

Winter Car Kit:

What do you need to keep IN your car? Some items the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends you include in a winter travel kit:

- Fully charged cell phone
- Blanket/sleeping bag
- Road maps
- Shovel
- Windshield scraper
- Battery-powered (and extra batteries) or crank radio
- Flashlight
- Water
- Nonperishable snack food (candy bars, raisins, dried fruit, granola bars)

- Extra warm clothes, such as insulated coveralls, jacket, hat, gloves, socks, and boots
- Tow chain or rope
- Tire chains
- Road salt, sand or non-skid mats (for traction, if stuck)
- Fluorescent distress flag (a bright bandanna tied to an antenna will work)
- Jumper/booster cables
- Emergency flares or reflectors
- First aid kit
- Two or more day supply of medications
- Candle, coffee can, and matches (stored in waterproof container)

Winter Maintenance:

In addition to considering what you need to have in your car, there are a few suggestions I have for what you need to do to your car.

- 1) Have your car serviced. A full-service tune up that includes oil change, air filter cleaning (or replacement), antifreeze fill, and brake fluid check will pay off during winter driving months. Make sure the service professionals check your tire tread, tire pressure, and tire wear. You may need to get your tires rotated or replaced. Having good tires on your car is critical for safe winter driving.
- 2) Check your windshield wiper blades. Look for cracks, missing pieces, or tears on the edge of the squeegee part of the blade. Check to make sure they are properly attached to the harness. Replace your windshield wipers every year at the most. Because of the heat and extreme weather conditions we have in Kansas, it is likely that you will need to replace them more frequently. Our local auto parts store employees can help you determine if you need new wipers, if your service person doesn't check them when you get your car serviced.

Winter Travel:

Regardless of the time of year, it is always smart to check the weather forecast before you leave your house. This information could impact the amount of time you are on the road or the route you may wish to take.

If you know you are going to be traveling in winter weather, let your family know where you are going, the route you intend to take, and how long you anticipate it will take to get there.

Make sure you leave home with a full tank of gas. This may keep you from needing to stop in the middle of your trip to get gas. If you are taking a long trip, don't let you gas

level get low. When you stop to get gas, you should clean off your windshield and wipers. Make sure your headlights are clear of snow and ice to help ensure others can see your car on the roadway.

Ben Franklin once said "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". This dated saying continues to be sage advice for helping us in all aspects of our life. Making sure your car is road ready provides an ounce of prevention that just may save your life. If you need more information on getting ready for the winter months, contact me at the Geary County Extension office 785-238-4161. Stay safe and warm and keep living resourcefully!