

Travel Safe This Holiday Season

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

We have a lot of people getting ready to put a lot of miles on the road. We've already seen winter driving conditions and there's sure to be more. There'll be short trips and there'll be long trips. There'll be tired drivers, excited drivers, impatient drivers and unfortunately a few impaired drivers. Every time we get behind the wheel of a car we can not automatically assume that every driver and vehicle that we encounter is going to respond in a normal and socially acceptable manner. It is up to each and every one of us to be alert, be defensive and use some common sense, especially when it comes to the weather.

Before your car pulls out of the driveway, you need to have it prepared for the trip, including adverse weather that you may well encounter. We always assume, when we start on a trip of any length, that we will get where we are headed, and return, without any weather or vehicle delays. But what happens if we do encounter bad weather. Do you have emergency supplies in the car? Do you have extra coats, hats, gloves and blankets in case you get stranded along the way?

Do you make sure that you always have at least one half tank of gas in your car? The last thing you want to do is to be stranded in cold weather with an empty gas tank! Make sure that you have some bottled water, energy bars, canned nuts and chocolate bars along for emergency rations. A flashlight, with extra batteries, as well as a whistle can be helpful for signaling would be rescuers. Get yourself an old fashioned 3 pound coffee can, a lighter or matches and some candles. A lit candle in a coffee can gives off enough heat to melt snow for emergency drinking water. It can also give off enough heat to keep frostbite away from your fingers!

The one thing that none of us can control, is the weather. If really bad weather is approaching, don't start out on that trip unless it is emergency. Sometimes a 24 hour delay can mean the difference between a successful trip and a frustrating trip. When you are out on the road, and you should do it anytime, but especially at the holidays with high traffic volumes, drive with your headlights on. It doesn't matter what time of day it is, your headlights make you much more visible, even more so than driving lights. Additionally, most vehicles don't have tail lights lit when driving lights are on. In cloudy weather and certainly in snowy weather, you want people in front of you and behind you to see you. Make yourself visible!

When you are driving on roads that aren't clear and dry, please slow down. Just because you can get that SUV or front wheel drive vehicle up to the speed limit, doesn't mean you can safely stop it in an emergency. The bigger the vehicle, the further it takes to stop once the wheels start sliding. Anti-lock brakes may help, but it'll still take you a lot further to stop. So you also want to increase following distance from other vehicles, and allow more time for crossing streets and roads. Never assume that road deicers are going to work 100% effectively. If the temperature is below freezing and there is any kind of precipitation, the road surface is losing traction. And if it gets too bad, just stop and find a motel! Remember you need more time to stop, turns need to be made slower and you have to assume the other person is liable to be out of control!

As long as we have winter weather, we will have bad driving conditions. As long as we have holidays, we'll have high traffic volume. Take your time, be extra patient, be defensive in your driving, and let's make sure we're all here to celebrate the New Year!