

Be Prepared for Winter Travel

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

We are a week away from the official start of winter. We've had a hint of winter weather, or at least wintery temperatures in recent weeks. We could have another winter with little to no snow and moderate temperatures. But even in mild winters, we can still have snow and ice, we can still have brief cold blasts, as we saw in February. As so many of us spend time in our vehicles, and with holiday travel on the horizon for many, now is a good time to make sure that you and your vehicle are prepared for potential wintery travel conditions.

Have professionals check your car over for winter readiness. Make sure the antifreeze is good to 20 or 30 below. Make sure your battery is in good shape. Last year, with that intense cold on the doorstep I had new batteries put in both of our cars. Batteries are most likely going to fail in extreme cold or extreme heat! If it's been a while since you've had a tune up, have that done as well. A car that is in good running condition will start more easily. Granted, it may sit in a garage at your house where it never gets below freezing. But you'll likely need to take it out some day when the temperature isn't going to get above freezing, so be prepared. Make sure that you have good all season tires or mud and snow tires that have plenty of tread left on them. Even an inch of snow can turn roads into skating rinks and if your tires are thin on tread, it's only going to make things worse.

Too many people head off to work or on a trip with the assumption that even if they run into bad weather, they can always stay warm in their car. That is a dangerous assumption so make sure you have extra winter clothing for everyone who will be in the car. That means, warm coats, gloves, or better yet mittens, stocking caps or some cap that will cover the ears. Scarves and blankets can also really help. Make sure that if everyone isn't wearing warm winter footwear that there are some in the car. If you get stranded you can kick off those high heels or fancy dress shoes and put on something that will keep your toes warm. Frostbite hit's the extremities first and those are the hardest to keep warm, so take proper steps before you are stranded in cold weather. Remember, we aren't looking to set fashion trends here, we're striving to keep you warm and alive!

I see far too many people driving around with gas tanks bouncing on empty. It is advisable to keep your gas tank at half full or above in the winter months. Even a five mile commute can turn deadly if you get stuck in a blizzard or slide off the road out of sight. It happens far too often. The more fuel you can keep in your car the longer you can keep it above freezing in your car.

If you do get stuck or stranded remember to stay with your car. Run the car for periods of time to warm it up and then turn it off. Make sure that the tailpipe does not become blocked with snow and let fresh air in by cracking windows a little bit. Carbon monoxide poisoning is real and it's deadly. Stay off your phone and when the car is running, charge your phone.

Ultimately, the best way to avoid travel issues is to not travel in inclement weather. These events are forecasted several days in advance so utilize a local radio station, National Weather Service forecast or one of the many smart phone weather apps to keep track of the local weather. If winter weather warnings are issued, simply delay travel unless absolutely necessary. Remember that your life, and the lives of your family, are more important than any trip or event might be.