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Wyoming Department of Transportation NEWS

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Winter Driving: It's a matter of preparedness

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ROCK SPRINGS – With winter just around the corner, many people are busy getting their homes ready for cold weather; but what about your vehicle and winter driving skills?

The extreme temperatures of winter can cause the failure of any weak components in the fuel delivery or ignition systems, so the vehicle will not start or will run poorly. Having your vehicle prepared for winter is as important as preparing your home and fall is the perfect time to have any needed service maintenance done to be able to avoid many dangerous winter travel problems by planning.

In addition to the maintenance recommended by the manufacturer, you should also:

- Have the radiator system serviced or check it yourself with an antifreeze tester and add antifreeze as needed,
- Replace windshield wiper fluid and blades with a wintertime grade,
- Replace any worn tires, and check the air pressure in the tires. It's also important to make sure that the spare tire kit has an inflated spare tire and all the proper tools needed to make the change as well as knowing how to change it.
- Have the heater/defroster checked to ensure working order,
- Have the battery and terminals checked to be sure there are no leaks or are damaged or corroded,
- Check all lights to be sure they are operating normally,
- Make sure all belts and hoses are in good condition. Replace soft or brittle hoses and belts that are cracked or damaged.
- During the winter, keep the tank near full to help avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
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Winter Survival Kits

Prepare a winter survival kit for each vehicle that is driven during the winter and that it is not taken out. Update the contents of your kit on a regular base and make sure all drivers and passengers know where to find it.

The type of kit you prepare is up to you, and the container can be anything ranging from cardboard boxes, large plastic ammo cans, and milk crates for the gallon-size fluid containers, to a Rubbermaid type box. The very basics should provide for water, food and warmth. You can add additional items and eventually develop a large kit, but you do not need to fill up the trunk.

Here are some of the basic items that it should contain:

1. Extra clothing, such as parka, boots, long underwear, heavy socks, mittens, ski mask.
2. Emergency blankets - wool blankets, sleeping bags - 2 large green or black plastic leaf bags (to reflect body heat) and some safety pins (the bags are for insulation for feet, safety pins keep the bags together.)
3. Heat reflective tarp -space blankets and tape (to use insulate windows, not as blankets.)
4. Signal mirror and a plastic coach's type whistle to signal help in case you hear a rescuer who cannot see you.
5. Bright red or orange cloth, or a roll of bright surveyor tape to attach to your antenna to draw attention to your car in heavy snow.
6. Water – 1 gallon per person - but do not eat snow! This uses up body heat and lowers your body temperature. Eating snow also dehydrates your body resulting in a net water loss! (Remember water expands when it freezes and may break containers if left in extreme cold.)
7. Flashlight with extra batteries (reverse the batteries to avoid accidental switching and burnout, and replace batteries yearly) warm batteries before using them. 12-hour light sticks are also a good addition.
8. Honey, hard candy, jellybeans, raisins, nuts, candy bars, chewing gum, dehydrated fruit, and jerky, high calorie and high-energy food such as snack bars, fruit rollups. Anything that does not need cooking is good to prolong your body's ability to generate heat in the event of being stranded for a long period.
9. Toilet tissue and a coffee can with a sealable lid for a makeshift toilet. Plastic bags for sanitation are helpful along with wet wipes and hand sanitizer.
10. Cell phone and charger. An old digital cell phone with the charger is perfect to put in the kit and leave. Service is not needed to make 911 calls on most modern cell phones and cell networks can triangulate your position, which is very handy in an emergency. Even "out-of-service" cell phones can still dial 911, although most analog phones will not work. If you do not have an extra phone, get a \$20 pre-paid phone with roaming.
11. Medium-sized snow shovel or a collapsible shovel.
12. Jumper cables and a tow rope or chain
13. Tire chains (know how to put them on your vehicle!)
14. Gas line antifreeze (use as recommended during winter to avoid problems)
15. Gallon container of defrosting windshield fluid, premixed antifreeze
16. Vehicle repair kit (pliers, screwdriver, adjustable wrench, cable ties, wire, electrical tape, duct tape, fuses, etc)
17. Bag of sand or non-clumping kitty litter for traction assistance or traction mats, can also use your car floor mats.
18. Snow brush and ice scraper
19. Sunglasses or ski goggles
20. Hand warmers (chemical type)
21. Fire extinguisher
22. Compass and maps
23. 50+ SPF sunscreen- you will quickly sunburn in snow conditions
24. Paper & pencils
25. First aid kit/book, aspirin or equivalent and with Imodium, decongestant, etc
26. Rain coat
27. Reflective tape or reflective triangles (flares are hard to find) if you are foregoing the reflective triangles you should at least get the reflective tape. This is the same type of

reflective material seen on traffic signs; it will be great if you are changing your tire in the dark.

28. Extra newspaper for insulation

This list is only a guideline, WYDOT suggests that you review it and adjust it for you and your family, but it is important to also consider...

- Baby formula and diapers if you have a small child.
- Do not forget your pets that are traveling with you. They need food, water and warmth also.
- Any prescription medication you take should be carried with you also.

You will want to place large items and items you will not need ready access to at the bottom of the kit. Jumper cables are large and would be cumbersome to move out of the way if you need to get to the first-aid kit, so they should go on the bottom.

Pre-trip... every trip

- Listen to forecasts and storm warnings, check road reports either online at wyoroad.info or by calling 511. Sign up for 511 Notify to have highway advisories delivered to your cell phone. 511 Notify is offered free of charge to the public, although subscribers should be aware that standard text messaging fees apply; you should check with your service provider for their rates.
- Allow extra time for trips in severe weather.
- Let people know, before you leave, where you are going, estimated time of arrival and the routes you plan to use get there. Stay with that route or notify those that expect you of your new route and expected arrival time.
- If the weather suddenly turns severe find a place to stop or do not start your trip. Make sure as soon as possible, that you notify those who expect you to be at a given point at a given time. If you do not, they may contact the police and a search and rescue mission could be started...for you.
- If you must go out in bad weather, dress properly for it. Many people do not wear boots, coats, or gloves, thinking they will be warm in the car but once the car has stalled, serious problems can result. Always dress for the worse weather you will encounter.

Safe Driving Practices

- If conditions become dangerous and appear to be getting worse, STOP. If it is sensible to return the way you came, do so, but parking on the interstate is not allowed.
- Stay on the main roads if you have a choice. The main road contains higher traffic, law enforcement officers and other rescue personnel will travel this roadway during bad weather, and the snow removal teams will clean the main roads first.
- Avoid using cruise control in winter driving conditions. You need to be in control of your vehicle and not let the cruise control make a bad decision for you.
- Remember that Wyoming has no minimum speed limits. Posted speed limits are set for when pavement surfaces are dry and clear. The number one cause for winter accidents is driving too fast for conditions. It's not worth the risk of going off the road or being in a crash just to save a couple of minutes. In fact, for a 60-mile trip, the difference between going 65 mph and 55 mph is only 10 minutes.
- Adjust speed for road conditions. On wet roads, motorists should reduce their speed by 5-10 miles an hour. On snow packed roads, reduce speed by half. When roads are icy,

speed should be reduced to a crawl, or even slower if there is traffic ahead, to maintain a steady flow of traffic.

- Never pass a plow on the right, or drive on the right shoulder to pass a plow. On non-interstate highways, snow plows discharge snow on the right. Many plows have a wing plow that takes up an additional 6 to 7 feet of space beyond the width of the plow. Discharged snow can conceal the wing from the view of traffic behind them.
- Be alert. White clouds are not common to the roadway and are most likely 'snow fog,' a fluffy snow discharged from the plow blades. Never drive into a cloud where visibility is limited and a rear-end collision is likely.
- Use caution when passing a snow plow. Make certain that the view of oncoming traffic is unrestricted when passing on two lane roads and pass only when it is safe. The front plow also can create a fluffy cloud of snow. Never drive into a snow cloud, as it may be concealing a snow plow.
- It is typical for snow plows to pick up the plow and come back later if there is a vehicle near the highway, but sometimes the hydraulics may not react fast enough, and cover the vehicle with snow or other debris discharged by the plow blades. To be safe, avoid stopping too close to the highway when approaching a highway from a side road if you see a snow plow coming.
- On multiple lanes, be alert for snow plows operating in either lane.
- Don't stay beside a plow for long periods of time. When plowing through a snowdrift or packed snow, the impact can move the snow plow sideways.
- Don't crowd the plow. Snow plows plow far and wide – sometimes very wide if they use a wing plow. The front plow extends several feet in front of the truck and may cross the centerline and shoulders while plowing.

Get a Feel for the Road

- When you first start out, accelerate carefully to test wheel-spin and brake gently to test skidding.
- Use the accelerator and brakes slowly to maintain control of your vehicle. Fast acceleration can make wheels spin on ice and snow.
- Brake with a gentle but firm action. Stepping too hard on the pedal will lock the brakes and cause loss of steering control.
- Increase your following distance. Ice or snow can multiply your stopping distance up to ten times.
- Make turns slowly and gradually. Heavily traveled intersections can become "polished" and slick, so brake before you come to a curve or intersection, not while you are in it.
- Turn in the direction of the skid. If the rear of your car begins to slide, turn into the direction of the skid. Expect a second skid as the car straightens out, and be prepared to counter this sliding action.
- Icy spots on the road surface can cause loss of steering control. Do not use your brake. Take your foot off the gas and steer as straight as possible until your car slows to a safe speed.
- In an emergency, you can intentionally steer your car off the road and into a snow bank. You may get stuck, but you'll avoid a crash.
- If you slide off the road or are stuck on the ice, remove the snow from around the car and spread something that will give you traction around the wheels. Slowly accelerate, keeping the wheels straight.

If you do go off the road or become stranded

Maybe you are prepared with an emergency winter survival kit in the trunk, but that is only half the battle. You need to take the necessary precautions to survive until help arrives. Here are some tips on what to do:

- If you are in a crash or stranded, call 911 to summon help. When you talk with authorities:
 - Provide information on your location, condition of all persons in the vehicle and the problem you are experiencing. Look for signs or landmarks so you can offer some idea of where you are.
 - Follow instructions; you may be told to stay where you are and wait for rescuers.
 - Do not hang up until you know whom you have spoken with and what will happen next.
- Remove your emergency supplies from your trunk and bring them into the car. Put on any extra winter clothing, such as a hat and gloves.
- If you believe you are going to be stranded for a significant period in cold weather, place the emergency space blankets over the windows of your vehicle to reflect body heat and other heat back into the car. Most of the initial heat loss will be through the windows.

Make Yourself Easy to Find

A vehicle in the snow quickly becomes invisible unless you make an effort to be seen, but there are some things you can do to help make yourself visible for rescue:

- Tie a piece of strip of orange material or triangle (one used on bicycles, surveyor tape or a piece of an orange garbage bag would work fine) to your antenna and doorknobs or hang it out a window.
- At night, remove the cover from your dome light and turn the light on. Road crews or rescue units can see a small glow at a considerable distance. To reduce battery drain, use emergency flashers only if you hear approaching vehicles. Keep one person on watch; do not let everyone sleep at the same time.
- Light a flare or place reflective triangles near the rear of your car to increase your visibility to passing motorists.
- If you slide off the road and can walk/climb to the roadway, tie markers to any highway signs that are close.

Stay With Your Vehicle

- Once you are organized, do not leave. Stay where you are until help arrives. If you have left the spot, rescuers may have to spend additional time (which could prove fatal for you) looking for you, the weather may get worse, or you may suffer from hypothermia. Studies show that you are more likely to survive if you do not venture out looking for help. Since you have informed someone about your route, the search and rescue crews know where to look.
- Walking in a storm can be very dangerous. You might lose your way or become exhausted, collapse and risk your life. Your vehicle is a good shelter.
- Know the symptoms of hypothermia and frostbite. Be sure to wear a wool cap or other insulating hat to prevent heat loss. Be particularly careful with children, who are not as aware of the danger they may be in or their body symptoms. Winter weather can kill an unprepared person who is exposed to the elements within minutes.

Avoid Overexertion

Shoveling snow or repositioning your car by pushing it takes a lot of effort. You could risk heart attack or injury. Remember two things:

1. Calm down and think. The storm will end and you will be found.
2. Don't work enough to get hot and sweaty. Wet clothing loses insulation value, making you susceptible to hypothermia.

Be Able to See and Be Seen

- Clean frost and snow off all windows, mirrors, lights and reflectors. If visibility is poor, use headlights.
- Your car windows will probably frost over on the inside due to condensation from breathing and water produced by the alcohol stove, if you are using one, so you may have to scrape frost from the inside of the glass too.

Keep Fresh Air in Your Vehicle

- It is much better to be cold and awake than comfortably warm and sleepy. Wet or wind-driven snow can plug your vehicle's exhaust system and cause deadly carbon monoxide gas to enter your vehicle. Do not run the engine unless you are sure the exhaust pipe is free of snow. Keep snow off the radiator to prevent the engine from overheating.
- If you must use your car engine to heat the vehicle, always check to make sure the exhaust tailpipe is clear. A blocked tail pipe can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning and death. Be sure to open a window when you are running the car engine, and try not to run the engine over 10 minutes in every hour.

Stay Warm Without Fuel

Keep your blood circulating freely by loosening tight clothing, changing positions frequently and moving your arms and legs. Huddle close to one another. Rub your hands together or put them in your armpits or between your legs. Remove your shoes occasionally and rub your feet.

Other tips to consider

- One aspect of winter survival most people never consider is dehydration. If your urine is dark in color, increase your water intake. Do not eat snow or suck on ice, they will lower your body temperature. Instead, melt them in a container first if possible.
- In the event that it is unsafe to remain in your vehicle and you leave your vehicle to go cross-country or down the road, leave a note in the vehicle so rescuers know which way to proceed. Write down your name, address, phone number and destination. Place the piece of paper inside the front windshield for someone to see.

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For more information about the press release, contact Theresa Herbin, Public Relations Specialist, WYDOT District 3, 307-352-3065