

April 4, 2022 LeeCARES Net Training: Driving in Bad Weather

Presented by Jason Korb, KI5ABB

A reported motor vehicle crash occurs on Texas roads about every 56 seconds. More than 10% -- nearly 60,000 crashes are due to poor weather conditions. Rain, wind, snow, ice, sleet, fog, and more extreme weather conditions, such as hurricanes, tornados, flooding, and electrical storms, increase the risks.

Postponing driving until after a severe weather system moves through the area is advised. However, for those who must drive, travel in extreme weather conditions is often stressful and can take longer. **Learn alternative routes** to avoid possible closed roadways or impassable bridges during bad weather.

Before Getting on the Road in Bad Weather

Proper vehicle maintenance before bad weather arrives is one of the most important steps for staying safe on the road. Old and brittle **windshield wipers** and dirty or damaged **headlights** can reduce visibility. Improper **tire pressure and tread** and worn **brakes** can decrease the vehicle's ability to stop or remain on the road. Check this equipment often to ensure it remains in good working order.

While on the Road in Bad Weather

While there are precautions specific to driving in the rain, fog, and winter conditions, these safe driving behaviors can reduce roadway hazards in all types of bad weather:

- **Slow down.** Reducing your speed by a third in bad weather helps decrease skids and accidents. Driving slower also makes it easier to avoid pedestrians, animals, and other obstacles along the roadway.
- **Leave room in the front.** Brake time is slower in bad weather, so leave 6 seconds of space between vehicles during bad weather to stop.
- **Use turn signals early.** Give plenty of notice to other drivers before slowing down to take a turn.
- **Listen to information about road conditions.** Listen to local weather radio (and SKYWARN nets) at a low volume during travel to stay informed of any area road closures or accidents.
- **Buckle up.** Texas law requires that all drivers and passengers wear seatbelts
- **Turn off the cruise control.** The uncertainty of road conditions during bad weather requires that drivers remain in control to make necessary adjustments.
- **Avoid hard braking.** When braking during bad weather, the driver should remove their foot from the accelerator and lightly brake to stop. Always watch for brake lights ahead.
- **Avoid sharp or quick turns.** Quick driving maneuvers can lead to skids and accidents.
- **Never drive beyond the limits of visibility.** The glare of oncoming lights and the rain, fog, or snow on the windshield can cause temporary loss of visibility and increase fatigue.
- **Pull over if needed.** Feeling tired? Find a safe spot off the road to rest, particularly if the weather worsens. It is often better to wait out bad weather than push on through storms.

Rain

Rain accounts for more than 85% of weather-related roadway crashes in Texas.³ Hydroplaning (when tires lose contact with the road), lightning flashes, high winds, decreased visibility, and rising water levels can create deadly driving conditions. The following safety measures can help prevent roadway crashes in rain:

- **Turn on headlights.** Even in daylight, use the vehicle's headlights in rain. It helps other drivers see oncoming vehicles and increases the driver's ability to see.
- **Drive in the middle lanes.** Stay on higher ground. Rainwater tends to pool on the outer edges of the road.
- **Steer clear of puddles and low-lying areas.** Driving into puddles or low-lying areas where rainwater collects, such as dips under rail or highway bridges or near streams, can cause vehicles to hydroplane out of control.
- **Do not follow trucks or buses closely.** Large vehicles can create a spray of water that can reduce nearby drivers' visibility. Always give other vehicles plenty of room. However, try to stay in the tracks of the vehicle in front of you as their tires push the water out of the way provide you with better contact with the road.

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- **Do not drive through flooded areas.** When coming to a flooded road, turn around. Flash flooding and strong currents can happen quickly, often sweeping drivers off roadways and into life-threatening situations. Never travel through water if the ground beneath it is not visible. Additionally, driving through deep water can damage a vehicle's mechanical and electrical systems.

Fog

Fog, or low-lying clouds at the earth's surface, contributed to 193 crashes and 72 deaths on Texas roads in 2019.⁴ These water or ice droplets suspended in air can impair a driver's ability to see and make travel difficult.

When fog decreases visibility to 0.25 miles or less, it is termed **heavy fog**.⁵ Local National Weather Service offices then issue a Dense Fog Advisory, encouraging drivers to take extra caution on the road or avoid driving if possible.⁶ If driving cannot be avoided, the following tips can help drivers remain safe:

Use low-beam headlights. Whether driving in fog in daylight or at night, turn on the vehicle's low-beam headlights and fog lights, if available. Never use high-beam headlights, which reflect light off the fog making it harder to see.

Turn on emergency flashers. By turning on the flashers, vehicles are more visible to other drivers approaching from behind.

Use the right edge of the road as a guide. When visibility is low, drive using the white reflective line on the side of the road as a guide. This helps keep the vehicle in its lane and protects the driver from the glare of oncoming headlights.

Do not change lanes. Fog can make it difficult to see, so avoid changing lanes or passing vehicles. Always watch for slow-moving and parked vehicles.

Pull to the side of the road if visibility decreases. Drivers who cannot see in fog should pull off the road with their flashers on. If possible, pull into a rest area or truck stop for added safety.

I am often amazed at how many drivers I see out on the roadways who do not use their headlights during rainy or foggy conditions. Just because you feel like you can see ok on the road does not mean that other drivers can see you. Also, when driving in fog, rain, or at night, try using amber tinted sunglasses or safety glasses (blue blocker). These tinted lenses will help cut the glare from rain drops, fog, and oncoming headlights, which will allow you to better see the road ahead.