

Safety Newsletter

November, 2012.

This Month's Topic: Driving in the Rain

Rain is here again and as we carry on with our daily commute, field work, and/or running errands, it is important to be mindful of the hazards, even a soft, rain pose to our health and safety.

In California, rain starts in late October through early March. It is well documented that accident rate goes up during rain. The following are tips for safe driving in the rain:

- ✦ Before it starts to rain, replace old or brittle wiper blades.
- ✦ Stay toward the middle lanes—water tends to pool in outside lanes.
- ✦ Maintain proper following distance (3 second rule). This needs to be increased in wet weather.
- ✦ Drive in the tracks of a vehicle ahead of you.
- ✦ Don't follow large trucks or busses too closely, because the spray created by their large tires can reduce vision.
- ✦ Be more alert watching for brake lights in front of you.
- ✦ Avoid using your brakes; if possible, take your foot off the accelerator to slow down.
- ✦ Turn your headlights on in a light rain and in gloomy, foggy, or overcast conditions to help you see the road and help other drivers see you.
- ✦ Avoid off-road driving; it's hard to judge the actual depth of puddles and standing water where you can easily become stuck.
- ✦ Never drive beyond the limits of visibility. The glare of oncoming lights, amplified by the rain on the windshield, can cause temporary loss of visibility while substantially increasing driver fatigue.
- ✦ Never drive through moving water if you can't see the ground through it; your vehicle could be swept off the road.
- ✦ Avoid driving through deep water, because it can cause serious damage to a modern vehicle's electrical system.
- ✦ If possible, stay off the road during heavy thunderstorms. Large flashes of lightning can temporarily blind and disorient drivers, and the accompanying high winds and heavy rain can create deadly driving conditions.
- ✦ When you need to stop or slow, do not brake hard or lock the wheels and risk a skid. Maintain mild pressure on the brake pedal.
- ✦ Watch the contours not only of the road, but also the fences, trees, hedges, and buildings at the side of the road ahead. If they appear to be unnaturally low, slow down at once, because the road is probably flooded.
- ✦ Watch out for places where floodwater collects, particularly low-lying roads adjacent to streams, and dips under rail or highway bridges.

Some of the challenges presented by rainy conditions are hydroplaning, poor visibility, and flooded roads/puddles.

Hydroplaning

When cars travel at high speeds—50 mph or more—on wet and/or oily roads, the tires are not in full contact with the road. They are riding on a layer of water and/or oil. Because there is no contact with the road, it's impossible to brake or steer. Hydroplaning most often happens in a light mist or drizzle. You can tell your car is hydroplaning when you notice a decrease in steering or braking ability, or the absence of the sound of your tires against the road. To prevent hydroplaning

- ✦ Slow down to less than 50 mph, as soon as it starts to rain.
- ✦ Keep tires properly inflated. Replace tires with worn tread.
- ✦ Drive in the tracks of the vehicle ahead of you. If you start to hydroplane, treat it like a skid. Don't hit the brakes. Slow down immediately, by easing your foot off the accelerator. Avoid sudden turns that could cause you to skid.



Do you know?

- ✦ That there are almost four times more fatal crashes during rainy conditions than during snow/sleet conditions?
- ✦ Roads are slipperiest just at the beginning of the first storm after a long dry spell?
- ✦ Your chances of Hydroplaning are much higher with a balding tire?
- ✦ Each year, over 38,700 vehicle crashes occur in fog. Over 600 people are killed and more than 16,300 people are injured in these crashes annually?
- ✦ There is an average of 7,400 fatalities in weather related traffic accidents per year?
- ✦ NHTSA estimates that 57% of weather related traffic accidents go unreported?
- ✦ In 2008, there were more fatalities in weather related accidents than in accidents involving texting?

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Visibility

With rain pounding on your windshield and the road around you, you need all the visibility you can get. Use your defroster as well as your wipers, to keep your windows as clear as possible. The time to replace your wiper blades, incidentally, is before the rainy season starts. To keep the blades in good shape, wash them when you wash your windshield. Turn on your low-beam headlights to make yourself more visible to other drivers whenever you use your wipers. In some states this is the law. *Treat the rain like most traffic hazards: slow down, increase your following distance and pay attention.*

Puddles

Avoid driving through puddles or flooded roads. Water on the road can hide dangerous debris or potholes. It can also flood your brakes so that they don't work just when you need them the most. If your brakes do get wet, dry them out by driving while holding the brake pedal down—just until the brakes begin to work again. When there is water on the road, check the road ahead and behind frequently for large vehicles that can send a blinding spray of water across your windshield. If you get caught in such a spray, remember these steps:

- ✚ Grip the wheel firmly.
- ✚ Stay off the brake.
- ✚ Be ready to brake when the view clears.

Remember, put safety first!

Pre-trip Inspection

- ✚ Check lights, windows and signal devices – you need to see and be seen!
- ✚ Proper tire treads can help provide traction and control in rain.

“Always allow for more travel time. You should plan to drive at a slower pace than normal when the roads are wet. Keep in mind that traffic is likely to be moving slower as well. There's also the possibility that your preplanned route may be flooded or jammed. Whatever the case, rushing equals higher risk.”

-Mike Painter
Senior Construction Manager