

Fort Bliss Safety Gram



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Winter Driving

Simply driving from one place to the next can be challenging in winter weather. Last year we lost one of our Fort Bliss Soldier while he was traveling north near Santa Fe, New Mexico to a tragic car accident. He drove into a snowstorm and lost control of his vehicle which caused him to suffer a head on collision with a truck, fatally injuring him. Snow and ice are rare in El Paso but do occur typically once or twice every year. Don't get taken by surprise during one of these storms. As we enter the winter season take time to review these winter driving safety tips. If you are traveling to the north, even just a couple hundred miles to the New Mexico mountains, anticipate winter road conditions and be prepared for them. Too often drivers underestimate the knowledge and skill that winter driving demands. This lack of understanding often results in a preventable tragedy. When winter weather is involved, the probability of encountering a dangerous situation is dramatically increased. Many of you continue to ride your motorcycles year-round which increases the risk of an accident far beyond that of four wheel vehicles should you encounter winter road conditions so extraordinary vigilance must be used as you continue to ride.



These are some of the factors which add hazards to driving in the winter:

- ◆ Ice, snow, and even water on road surfaces reduce traction, increasing stopping distance, and possibly resulting in a skid. It takes far more distance to stop on an icy road than it does on a dry road.
- ◆ As the temperature nears the melting point, roads become even more slippery than they are in severely cold weather. Traffic also polishes ice and snow pack on a road surface.
- ◆ Black ice is a thin and invisible layer of frost on pavement. It commonly occurs around bridges and overpasses and shaded areas, but be alert for it on all road surfaces.
- ◆ Visibility decreases drastically in winter driving conditions. Long nights and short days in some areas mean you spend more hours behind the wheel when you can see little beyond your headlights. Snow, rain and fog also cut visibility.
- ◆ Vehicle breakdown under winter conditions can be life threatening because of freezing weather and the possibility of chain reaction collisions.

Those tips will help generally through the season. But keep these other pointers in mind when the temperatures drop and the roads are icy or snow-covered:

- ◆ Prepare your car. Add fuel line de-icer to the fuel tank and keep your washer reservoir filled with washer fluid rated for freezing temperatures. Check the reservoir periodically and refilled it to avoid running out of fluid while driving. Put on all-season tires keep them properly inflated.
- ◆ Clear all snow from your car's windows, lights, license plates, and roof. Snow blowing from the roof of your car is a visibility hazard to the driver behind you.
- ◆ Back off. Have patience and give people more lead-time, especially if there's packed snow or ice on the road. Be ready if the car ahead suddenly spins out.
- ◆ If you go into a skid, take your foot off the gas, steer into the skid, and regain control. If you have to stop right away, pump your brakes - don't slam on them. If your car has anti-lock braking systems (ABS), apply steady pressure to the brake pedal.

- ◆ Carry a winter survival kit, especially on long trips or in isolated areas. Include matches, candles, a parka, a sleeping bag or emergency blanket, food, first aid kit, jumper cables with safety goggles, a flashlight, wrenches for minor repairs

The most important safety tip to keep in mind when driving in the snow is to slow down and be careful! Give yourself some extra time to get to your destination. And we'll see you in the spring.

