

Follow these steps to ensure safe winter driving

Part of parenting is dispensing driving advice. For example, in icy weather young drivers may be told, "Take it slow. Don't drive any faster than the speed at which you're willing to hit a brick wall." Thanks Mom. Thanks Dad.

Driving slowly and cautiously is good advice, but Car Care Canada reminds motorists of other cold weather tips.

The first and most important is to be proactive. That means making sure your car is mechanically sound before the temperature dips and the streets get icy.

Car Care Canada recommends the following tasks be performed by a do-it-yourselfer or professional auto technician:

- Check the coolant (antifreeze); coolant should be flushed and refilled every two years in most vehicles.
- Check the owner's manual to see if your driving habits are considered "severe," and if so, have the oil changed accordingly, usually every 5,000 kilometres;



consider changing to a "winter weight" oil if you live in a cold climate.

- Check the battery and exhaust system.

- Be certain the heater and defroster are working properly.
- Ensure that your windshield is free of dings and cracks. Cold temperatures can turn a small ding in your windshield into a major crack.
- Keep the gas tank at least half full, decreasing the chances of moisture forming in the gas lines and possibly freezing.
- Check tire tread depth and tire pressure; consider special tires if snow and ice are a problem in your area.
- Check to see that lights work and headlights are properly aimed. The end of Daylight Savings Time in the fall results in earlier nightfall and more nighttime driving. It's the perfect time to upgrade your headlights. Remember, when it's time to change your clocks, it's probably time to change your headlights.
- Replace wiper blades every six months; consider special snow blades if the weather dictates.
- Be prepared for an emergency with the following items in your trunk: ice scraper, windshield de-icer, flashlight, whisk broom, blanket, extra clothes, candle/matches, bottled water, snacks, necessary medications and a first-aid kit.

Engine and Cooling System

First, if you're a Do-It-Yourselfer, get under the hood. Otherwise, visit your friendly automotive technician. Winter only magnifies existing problems like pings, hard starts, sluggish performance or rough idling, so make certain the engine is in peak condition. Check the cooling system, too. Coolant should be flushed and refilled every two years. Your folks will not necessarily know this, so don't wait for their nod on this one.

Oil Change

Check the owner's manual to see if your driving habits are considered to be "severe service." This type of driving requires more frequent oil changes, warns Car Care Canada. Have the oil changed accordingly, usually every 5,000 kilometres or so. For less wear and tear on the engine, drivers in cold climates (sub-zero driving temperatures) should drop their oil weight from 10-W30 to 5-W30. Your mom and dad would probably suggest simply moving to someplace warmer.



Four other musts

The battery and exhaust system are other "must check" items. These should be examined using professional equipment. Make certain the heater/defroster are working properly and keep the gas tank full. In addition to staying ready for the road, a full fuel tank decreases the chances of moisture forming in the gas lines and possibly freezing.

Exterior concerns

Now for the outside of the vehicle: tires, lighting and wipers. Both tire tread and tire pressure should be checked weekly. If snow and ice are a problem in your area, consider winter tires designed to grip slick roads. Lights should be inspected regularly. Check to see that bulbs are illuminated, and headlights are properly aimed.

Your headlights dim over time and should be changed in pairs about once a year.

Finally, replace wiper blades every six months. Consider winter/snow blades if the weather dictates.

Emergencies

Even the most meticulously maintained vehicle can develop problems on the road, especially during inclement weather. That's when it pays to be prepared for an emergency. Tapping the Trunk - Use that big space for something more than a spare tire (which, incidentally should be properly inflated, just in case). Pack items that would be needed if you got stranded for a several hours. A cell phone (with a car charger) is a good start. Also include the following: ice scraper, windshield de-icer, flashlight, whisk broom, blanket, extra clothes, candle/matches, bottled water, snacks, needed medication.

—Car Care Canada

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