



NAVAL SAFETY COMMAND

SAFETY AWARENESS DISPATCH



SA 24-36

Winter Driving III

Winter can be a magical time. With its official start quickly approaching, many of us can be expecting cold weather (in the northern latitudes, some of us already have it). Along with the cold weather, hazardous road conditions are coming back. The Federal Highway Administration reports that more than 116,800 accidents occur on snowy or icy roads and 76,000 accidents occur during actual snowfall or sleet. Seventy percent of the nation's roads are in areas that get more than five inches of snow. So, there's a good chance that many of us driving home for the holidays will meet inclement conditions. To avoid being one of the statistics, please read and remember these misadventures of our failed "winter wizards" of the roads.



- ♪ You Spin Me Right Round Baby Right Round ♪. A Sailor and two passengers were making a trip to a national park. Road conditions were good at the start of the trip, but 20 minutes in, the Sailor encountered slushy ice on the road. Before he could slow down, he saw a car in the opposite direction splashing slush across his lane. He couldn't avoid the additional icy buildup and, upon driving over the slush, the vehicle fishtailed left with the tail end crossing into the opposite lane...toward an oncoming truck. The Sailor jerked the wheel right to avoid the vehicle, but that made the tail end fishtail worse and set him on a course to strike a telephone pole. The Sailor then jerked the wheel back to the left, where physics decided it had enough. With the additional ice on the road and the erratic turning, the vehicle went into a complete spin to the left. It rotated one full circle to the left before the tires suddenly gained traction on the shoulder, which stopped the spin, but flipped the car on its roof. Thankfully, they were all wearing their seatbelts, so they escaped with minor injuries. —*Just because the road starts off friendly doesn't mean it's going to stay that way. Pay attention to weather forecasts and check road conditions before departing on longer drives. Slow down in snowy, icy conditions. And if you start to slide, take your foot off the accelerator, steer into the skid and brake lightly, very lightly.*
- Follow the Leader. A mountain base received one to three inches of snow shortly after the new year, causing problems for several people who lacked appreciation for gravity and friction (*they appreciate it now, though*). On his way into work, a government civilian (driver #1) attempted to drive around a delivery truck parked on a hill. As he tried to turn around the truck, his vehicle lost traction and slid into the truck (*crunch!*). Base authorities marked the scene with cones and sent messages instructing people not to use the road. Fifteen minutes after the first incident, a Marine (driver #2) (*who didn't get the message*) tried to drive around the delivery truck and got the same results, making it a 3-car accident. Another 15 minutes later...(*can you guess what happened?*) another Marine (driver #3) (*who must've not received the message either*) tried the hill with the same result, adding his vehicle to the now 4-car pile. The report noted that personnel on this base are advised to use snow chains in inclement weather. —*We'll repeat the previous message. Check road conditions **before** you leave, especially after a fresh snow. There is no point in contributing to a multi-car pileup that you should have known about.*
- I Can See Clearly Now. A Sailor woke up before dawn at the barracks to go to work. When he got to his car, the windshield was covered with frost. He decided it would be too much work to scrape the ice off the windshield and elected to simply use the car's defrost setting (*ok; we've been there too*). After about five minutes, this method was not going fast enough, and the Sailor did not want to be late. Instead of giving in and scraping the ice off, he adapted and overcame (*or so he thought*). While not able to see out the windshield, the Sailor did the only other thing he could think of. In an "Ace Ventura, Pet Detective" moment (*it's an old movie, but it's funny*), he stuck his head out the driver's side window and began to drive out of

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the parking lot. Fate wasn't on his side though. As he accelerated, another car started backing out. He tried to pull his head back in the car and brake, but his awkward driving position didn't help. Instead of hitting the



brakes, he stepped on the accelerator! The car lurched forward straight into the other vehicle, hard enough to deploy his airbags and cause whiplash to both drivers. —So, in order to not be late to work, he instead opted for neck pain, car repair bills, AND being late to work anyway (and gifted all the same to the Sailor he hit; thanks a lot “Shipmate”). Next time just scrape the window. Driving on winter roads is hazardous enough. Adding carelessness to the mix makes it worse. Cold hands are better than a neck brace.

- Going To Miss the Flight. A Sailor was transporting students to the airport with the 15-passenger duty van. It was mid-winter in a northern state. He must have been

running behind schedule because he was driving 78 mph (*hmmm, not many places where that is the speed limit*). Along his route the Sailor struck a patch of black ice and lost control, spinning first into the rear of a minivan, then into a light pole, and lastly into a ditch. Miraculously no one was injured. —*Black ice is notorious for being almost impossible to see. In a northern state in mid-winter, it shouldn't be a surprise though, should it? Driving excessively fast after snow or freezing rain is asking for trouble and will definitely make you late for check-in. Slow it down, Luigi; this isn't Mario Cart.*

- Show Me a Sign. A Sailor driving to work came to an intersection where the traffic light was obstructed by snow and ice that had not melted from a blizzard earlier in the week. In the absence of guidance from the all-knowing stop light, the Sailor rolled through the intersection without stopping (*Sailor's internal thought process: “Who has the right of way? It must certainly be me”*). Well, another driver traveling on the perpendicular street must have had the same absence of caution as the Sailor because as he proceeded into the intersection, he collided with that other car, which ricocheted him into a third car. —*Just because it isn't snowing doesn't mean there aren't hazards. FYI, if there's no functioning signage or stop light at an intersection, the law says all parties must stop as if there were a stop sign. Common sense says pretty much the same thing.*

Key Takeaways

With a bit of risk management and planning, most of the mishaps in this dispatch were avoidable. Please visit our site and check on more tips about fall and winter safety: <https://navalsafetycommand.navy.mil/Stand-Down/Safety-Stand-Down/>.

1. **Prepare for winter driving.** Inspect your tires, wipers, brakes, antifreeze levels and heater. Clean your headlights and test your battery. **And buy a window scraper (they are as little as \$6).** For a comprehensive list, check out the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's winter driving tips here: <https://www.nhtsa.gov/winter-driving-tips>.
2. **Have a plan...and a plan B.** Check the weather before and during travel to avoid getting caught in a storm. Before you go, keep blankets, coats, flashlights and snacks in your vehicle in case you get stranded. Leave with plenty of time so you're not in a rush. Have a backup plan; it can be the difference between arriving safely at your destination or not arriving at all.
3. **Slow it down, Luigi.** Leave plenty of space between you and other vehicles—and Slow Down. As you go faster, the distance should increase. The National Safety Council recommends a minimum of three seconds following distance. To check, pick a sign or marker that the vehicle in front of you passes. Count how many seconds it takes before you pass the same spot. If it's less than three seconds, you're too close.
4. **Curb the Alcohol.** As always, we have to reinforce sober driving because too many traffic fatalities in the naval services were alcohol-related. Navigating winter road conditions is hard enough without being impaired...and it's illegal...and we don't want you to hit **us** while we're out there!

And, like we always remind you, “Let's be careful out there.”