

Tip of the Week

January 31, 2005

Be Careful Out There!



Most people, even Texans, realize that driving in the winter can be downright dangerous. Here are a few helpful tips to make things easier, and safer. They're all pretty obvious, but for some reason people out there (other than CleanAir employees, of course) tend to forget them:

Clear off the entire vehicle, not just a little peephole in the windshield. First of all, you need just as much, if not more, visibility in poor conditions, because you have to keep your eye peeled for every other knucklehead on the road. Make sure every glass surface is clear and transparent by using a snow brush and/or ice scraper. Your side view mirrors and all lights should be brushed and cleared as well.

Check all lights, including headlights, parking lights, tail lights, backup lights, and lane-change signals. Make sure they are free of snow or road grime. Even if you don't wash your car all winter, keep your lights clean.

Make sure the wipers are not frozen to the glass before turning on the ignition. Before turning off ignition, always remember to stop the wipers with the wiper switch and wait until they go into their "park" position. This is necessary because your wipers will finish one cycle when you turn on the ignition, even though you turn the wipers off right before turning on the ignition the next morning.

Make sure your windshield washer reservoir is full. On a snowy or even just a messy day, you can easily go through half a gallon of fluid trying to keep your windshield clear. For that reason, it's also a good idea to keep some extra fluid in the trunk in case you run out. And make sure you get the good stuff – stay away from the half-frozen blue stuff outside your local gas station! Even though it may say "Good to Minus 30," some of these cheap blue fluids freeze around zero degrees. If you're driving in a very cold area, you also may need to supplement your windshield washer fluid with some concentrate.

Keep the gas tank close to full. In the summer, you can take a chance and run down to fumes. But in the winter, if you do get stuck or stranded, the engine will be your only source of heat. And you don't want to have to worry about conserving fuel and saving the planet right at that moment...you want to stay warm. (And make sure you keep a window open a crack if you're sitting there with the engine running. We can't afford to lose any employees from carbon monoxide asphyxiation.)

When driving in the snow, do everything slowly. Even with good coolant, snow tires, traction control, all-wheel drive and a six-pack in the trunk, keep in mind that driving in snow, sleet and ice is very treacherous. And even if you maintain control of your vehicle, not everyone else will. So, don't ever get lulled into a false sense of security. Do everything slowly and gently. Remember, in the snow, the tires are always just barely grabbing the road. Accelerate slowly and gently, turn slowly and gently and brake slowly and gently. To do this, you have to anticipate turns and stops. Leave plenty of distance between you and other cars.

Do not use the cruise control in bad weather because if and when the tires slip it causes cars to accelerate and you could lose control of the vehicle.

Listen to the sound of the tires on the pavement. A wet road makes a lot more noise than an icy or snow-covered road. If things suddenly get quiet underneath the car, you may have just gone from just-wet to just-dangerous.