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Cold Weather Driving

Safety Tips from the Canadian Government Office of Occupational and Health Safety

These safety tips and loss prevention ideas are meant to be helpful to your business success. We hope you will feel these are valuable enough to share with the appropriate staff at safety meetings or through conversations with your employees.

HOW SHOULD YOU PREPARE A VEHICLE FOR DRIVING UNDER WINTER CONDITIONS?

Driving in winter weather -- snow, ice, wet and cold -- creates a great challenge for vehicles and drivers. Keeping your vehicle in good technical repair reduces your overall chances for any mishap or disaster while driving -- particularly in winter weather. To prepare your vehicle for winter driving give it a complete checkup. Look for the following:

ELECTRICAL SYSTEM:

- **Battery** Recharge or replace if the battery is weak.
- **Ignition** Check for damaged ignition wires and cracks in the distributor cap.
- **Lights** Check all lights (headlights, side lights, emergency flashers, directional lights, tail lights, brake lights and parking lights) for proper functioning.

BRAKES:

Check brakes and adjust to ensure equal braking.

TIRES:

The traction between tires and roadway determines how well a vehicle rides, turns and stops, and is crucial for safe driving in winter. Proper tire selection is very important.

- Use all-season radial tires only in areas that receive only light snowfall.
- Use snow tires in areas that receive heavy snowfall.
- Use chains on all four wheels when you expect severe snow and icy roads.
- Check tire pressure and if necessary restore it to levels recommended by the tire manufacturer. The pressure drops about 1 psi for every 9 degrees drop in temperature.
- Do not mix radial tires with other types.
- Check wheel alignment and correct if necessary.

EXHAUST SYSTEM:

- Check the exhaust system for leaks. A properly sealed exhaust system reduces the risk for carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Keep the window in your vehicle slightly open when you're stuck in snow, and run the engine and heater to keep warm.
- Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow. A blocked pipe can force carbon monoxide back into the car interior.

HEATING / COOLING SYSTEM:

- Check the radiator and hoses for leaks.
- Ensure that your vehicle always has a sufficient amount of antifreeze rated for the coldest weather.
- Check the defrosters (front and back) to make sure they are working efficiently.

WINDSHIELD WIPERS:

- Ensure that windshield wipers function efficiently. Replace them if they are old or worn.
- Fill the washer container with an antifreeze fluid and top it up frequently.

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A WINTER DRIVING KIT?

A well-stocked winter driving kit helps to handle any emergency. It should include:

- Properly fitting tire chains
- Bag of sand or salt (or kitty litter)
- Traction mats
- Snow shovel
- Snow brush
- Ice scraper
- Booster cables
- Warning devices such as flares or emergency lights
- Fuel line de-icer (methanol, also called methyl alcohol or methyl hydrate)
- Extra windshield wiper fluid appropriate for sub-freezing temperatures
- Roll of paper towels
- Flashlight and a portable flashing light (and extra batteries)
- Blanket
- Extra clothing, including hat and wind-proof pants, and warm footwear
- First aid kit Snack bars or other "emergency" food and water
- Matches and emergency candles - only use with a window opened to prevent build-up of carbon monoxide.
- Road maps
- "Call Police" or other help signs or brightly colored banners.

OTHER TIPS:

- Warm up your vehicle BEFORE driving. It reduces moisture condensing on the inside of the windows.
- NEVER warm up your vehicle in a closed garage.
- Remove snow and ice from your vehicle. It helps to see and, equally important, to be seen.
- Wear sunglasses on bright sunny days.
- Bring a cell phone if you have one but do not leave it in the car as the battery will freeze.

IF YOU GET STUCK:

- Don't panic!
- Avoid over-exertion and over-exposure to the cold. Cold weather can put extra stress on the heart and contribute to the hazards of over-exertion.
- Stay in the car if you cannot shovel your car out of the snow.
- Stay in the car in blizzard conditions - do not leave the car for assistance unless help is visible within about 100 yards.
- Turn on flashing lights or set up flares. A brightly colored cloth on the radio antenna may make your vehicle more visible in daylight.
- Run the car engine occasionally (about 10 minutes every hour) to provide heat (and to conserve fuel). Ensure that the tail exhaust pipe is free of snow and keep the window opened slightly (on the side shielded from the wind) to prevent the build up of carbon monoxide when the engine is running.
- Bundle up in a blanket. If there is more than one person in the car, share - two people sharing blankets will be warmer than either person alone in a blanket.
- Wear a hat and scarf - the head and neck are major sources of heat loss from the body.
- Monitor for any signs of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Do not fall asleep. If there is more than one person in the car, take turns sleeping.
- Do not stay in one position too long. Do some exercises to help the circulation - move arms and legs, clap your hands, etc.
- Watch for traffic or rescuers.

Seth Shapiro
Risk Strategies team
seth.shapiro@kpcom.com.

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