Inclement Weather

This hand-out offers advice for driving during inclement weather. With each season comes a range of conditions all of which need to be managed safely.

The weather conditions discussed in this hand-out are:

- Rain
- Snow and Ice
- Bright Sunlight
- High Winds
- Fog

Rain

The Highway Code gives advice in relation to doubling potential stopping distances when driving on a wet road, but there is so much more to consider when driving in wet conditions.

Ensure your windscreen and wipers are in good condition and the washer system works correctly. Know how to operate them. Be able to set the ventilation system to demist, as the rain is likely to cause misting on the inside of the windows.

Consider if you are struggling to see other drivers that they may struggle to see you. Consider dipped headlamps (not fog lamps as they dazzle).

Standing water may affect steering, a puddle may pull the wheel towards the verge or centre of the road. Apply a firm grip to prevent unwanted steering.

Deep water may cause "aquaplaning" this is where the tyre treads are unable to clear sufficient water and a wedge of water forms and preventing the tyre from gripping the road it feels like driving on ice and steering and braking capabilities are lost.

Take your foot off the accelerator and retain a light grip on the steering wheel, do not brake or attempt to steer as any input is likely to be excessive when the grip returns. The grip will return within a short time do not overreact.

If possible avoid standing water,

Consider

What is in it?
Does it have potentially damaging pot holes that are now concealed?

How deep is it?
Will it flood the air intake of the vehicle? If so don't drive into it as the engine may "hydro-lock" causing major damage.

If you must go through it and it is not too deep keep engine revs high but speed slow.

When you reach the other side dry the brakes by applying them in a safe area.

Snow & Ice

Highway code advice for stopping distances in the snow and ice is they need to be increased by up to 10 times.

On packed snow and ice the tyres have virtually no grip available, which has a serious

effect on vehicle stability programmes almost negating them. Whilst it is possible to get a vehicle moving reasonably effectively, stopping it or changing direction can be much more difficult.

Gentle acceleration in the highest possible gear will assist in moving away. Slowing down is best achieved using the gears. A common problem in snow and ice is driving at a generic speed which is perceived to be "safe". At times it may be that 40mph is acceptable but at other times 15mph may be far too fast.

Where you need to be able to change direction or perhaps to stop, reduce speed gradually. Be aware that the car may skid. ABS systems are designed to allow the wheel to lock at very low speeds (otherwise they would never stop) severely reduced grip may mean the vehicle slides forward at a slow speed.

Coarse steering may induce a skid. Be smooth and progressive with steering in order not to break grip. If you steer do it gently until you are back to the course you wish the car to follow.

Understand that packed snow may adhere to the wheel arches and affect steering.

Make sure you carry extra clothing/blankets in the vehicle to stay warm in the event of being stranded.

Be aware some small roads are not always treated for ice, if there is evidence of road salt on major routes, or the temperature is low, take extra care. In extreme conditions stay on the major routes if possible.

Understand where a micro climate is likely to occur, ice may form in isolation in low lying areas under trees or on bridges and will remain for longer in shaded areas.

Bright Sunlight

Bright sunlight may affect your vision. If it does you must slow down. In winter the sun is lower and may affect you even more.

If you decide to wear sun glasses be aware they will reduce your vision out of tinted windows. Take extra care when emerging from junctions and if in any doubt don't move. Be ready to remove the glasses if you drive into a tunnel or shaded area.

Know how to use the sun visor to best effect.

High Winds

Be aware that wind will affect vehicles in different ways. High sided vehicles will be more susceptible to wind and speeds must be reduced.

When passing a high sided vehicle be aware the wind affecting you will change, and give them as much space as possible. If you see them being affected don't pass.

Be especially careful if crossing exposed bridges.

Fog

Fog and mist cause some of the most dangerous and difficult driving conditions.

Use dipped beam, many modern car instrument panels light up even when the headlights are turned off so check the control to be sure. Use your fog lights when the visibility drops below 100m. Don't forget that when the fog clears, you will need to turn the fog lights off again as soon as possible, otherwise you may dazzle other road users. Remember in patchy fog, you may need to turn your fog lights off in the clearer patches, and on again when the fog gets thicker.

Avoid using full beam, even when there's nobody else around, because the fog will reflect the light back at you, and that has the effect of reducing, rather than improving, your vision.

A sensible technique when it's foggy is to turn the radio off and open your windows at junctions – that way, you can listen for oncoming cars when you can't see them.