

TRUCK TALK

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Winter Driving Errors

Professional drivers are expected to be aware of the special challenges and potential hazards associated with winter driving. However, each winter many drivers find themselves involved in an accident that could have been prevented had safe winter driving skills been in place. The following are some of the most common winter driving errors which often lead to accidents:

- Failing to react to trouble ahead. Drivers often underestimate the time and distance needed to stop. Prepare to stop as soon as you note the potential for trouble ahead; do not wait to start to reduce your speed.
- Excessive speed for conditions. Not having control of a situation and loss of traction are the end result of this winter driving error.
- Driving in a fatigued condition. Learning to recognize when enough is enough and stopping to rest are important decisions, especially under the stress of driving in severe weather conditions.
- Failing to adjust for changing weather conditions. What are the two most frequently cited reasons for accidents during inclement weather? Reduced traction and reduced visibility. You must constantly be looking for changing weather conditions and adjust your driving accordingly.
- Following distance (or lack thereof). What is it that makes a truck go, and a truck stop? Traction. When roads and tires are wet or ice-covered, it just plain takes longer to start and stop. The following distance on dry roads in July is much different than the following distance needed in January on snow or ice covered roads.
- Continuing to drive when it is not safe to do so. With all of the technology available out there to obtain weather forecasts, radar images, etc., still the best predictor of a driving situation is the driver. You do not

want to be late with your load, but it is going to be even later if you have to be pulled out of the median or a ditch. If conditions deteriorate to the point where it is unsafe to drive, find the nearest safe place to park and wait for conditions to improve.

- Over-confidence in your abilities. This driving error leads to improper following distance, fatigued driving, and a host of other habits not befitting a professional driver. In severe winter driving conditions, your driving ability simply cannot overcome the slick roads, reduced visibility, the effects the cold weather has on your tires and brakes, and the increased stress on yourself.
- Failing to clean off windows, head and tail lights adequately. Since we all know that reduced visibility is a major cause of wintertime accidents, this is something that has to be done each time you stop when operating in winter weather driving conditions. This allows you to see better, but also allows the other vehicles to see you better.
- Look ahead and drive defensively. Watch out for other drivers and be prepared to compensate for their mistakes. Look both ways before entering an intersection, even if you have the right-of-way. Many collisions happen when the other vehicle could not get stopped in time.

Attitude is the single most important factor in safe driving, regardless of the driving conditions. A good attitude means avoiding unnecessary risks by putting safety first and focusing all of your attention on your driving. Drivers with a good attitude have fewer accidents, regardless of their driving skills, because they do not place themselves in high risk situations in the first place.

Did I mention SLOW DOWN and INCREASE YOUR FOLLOWING DISTANCE ?