



Driving in the Rain

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A 5-Minute Safety Training Aid

Driving in rain can be dangerous. The most important thing for drivers to remember is to SLOW DOWN!

In rainy conditions pedestrians, livestock, and wildlife are extremely hard to spot and even harder to avoid. It takes longer to stop or adjust speed in wet weather.

The following are tips for safe driving in the rain.

- Before it starts to rain, replace old or brittle wiper blades.
- Stay toward the middle lanes—water tends to pool in outside lanes.
- Maintain proper following distance (3 second rule). This needs to be increased in wet weather.
- Drive in the tracks of a vehicle ahead of you.
- Don't follow large trucks or busses too closely, because the spray created by their large tires can reduce vision.
- Be more alert watching for brake lights in front of you.
- Avoid using your brakes; if possible, take your foot off the accelerator to slow down.
- Turn your headlights on in a light rain and in gloomy, foggy, or overcast conditions to help you see the road and help other drivers see you.
- Avoid off-road driving; it's hard to judge the actual depth of puddles and standing water where you can easily become stuck.
- Never drive beyond the limits of visibility. The glare of oncoming lights, amplified by the rain on the windshield, can cause temporary loss of visibility while substantially increasing driver fatigue.
- Never drive through moving water if you can't see the ground through it; your vehicle could be swept off the road.
- Avoid driving through deep water, because it can cause serious damage to a modern vehicle's electrical system.
- If possible, stay off the road during heavy



Photo courtesy AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

thunderstorms. Large flashes of lightning can temporarily blind and disorient drivers, and the accompanying high winds and heavy rain can create deadly driving conditions.

- When you need to stop or slow, do not brake hard or lock the wheels and risk a skid. Maintain mild pressure on the brake pedal.
- Watch the contours not only of the road, but also the fences, trees, hedges, and buildings at the side of the road ahead. If they appear to be unnaturally low, slow down at once, because the road is probably flooded.
- Watch out for places where floodwater collects, particularly low-lying roads adjacent to streams, and dips under rail or highway bridges.

Hydroplaning

Hydroplaning happens when the water in front of the tires builds up faster than the vehicle's weight can push out of the way. The water pressure causes the vehicle to rise up and slide in a thin layer of water between the tires and the road. At this point, the vehicle can be completely out of contact with the road, and in danger of skidding or drifting out of the lane.

If you find yourself hydroplaning or skidding:

- do not brake or turn suddenly;
- ease your foot off the gas until the vehicle

slows and you can feel traction on the road again;

- Turn your steering wheel in the direction of the skid. As you recover control, gently straighten the wheels; and
- if you need to brake, do it gently with light pumping action. Your vehicle has anti-lock brakes, then brake normally. Because the vehicle's computer will mimic a pumping action.

There are three main factors that contribute to hydroplaning:

- Vehicle speed. As speed increases, wet traction is considerably reduced. Since hydroplaning can result in a complete loss of traction and vehicle control, you should always reduce speed when driving in wet weather.
- Tire tread depth. Maintaining adequate treading on tires and replacing them when necessary can help prevent hydroplaning. Tire experts can measure tread depth with a specially designed tread depth gauge and recommend checking tire treads depth every 2-3 months.
- Water depth. The deeper the water, the sooner you will lose traction, although even thin water layers can cause a loss of traction, including at low speeds.

What to do if you stall in deep water

If stalled in deep water, if possible, have someone pull your vehicle out using a towrope or cable winch. It may be possible to drive a manual transmission vehicle out using the starter motor. You can make the job easier by removing your sparkplugs, thereby lowering your compression and making your starter turn more easily. Take great care not to let water enter the cylinders, as it will hydro-lock your engine, ruining it. This is a last resort for rescuing a flooded vehicle and is not recommended.

Check your brakes

If you successfully pass through a deep-water hazard, test your brakes. They may be saturated, and only driving very slowly and braking lightly at the same time will generate enough heat to dry them out. Be sure they are pulling evenly on all wheels before building up speed again.

Remember to practice safety. Don't learn it by accident.

This Take 5 was published with information from the Houston Texas Parks & Recreation Department and the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI), Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC) .