



Whether you're just out of [truck driver school](#) or a seasoned veteran on the roads, winter weather can make operating your rig a tricky proposition.

Use these winter driving safety tips for commercial drivers to make sound decisions and be safe out on the roads this winter.

#### Prepare for the Worst

Even though the weather may not look bad when you head out, things can change in a hurry. **Once cold weather hits, it's best to always be prepared for the worst.** Have these items on hand just in case conditions go south:

- Extra gloves.
- Rain gear.
- An extra jacket.
  - Make sure you have one that's **warm enough for nighttime temperatures.**
- Extra food and water.
  - You never know when you may get stranded.
- Sand or salt.
  - **Using sand or salt** can help **keep your tires from spinning** if you get stuck.
- Windshield scraper.
- Windshield washer fluid.
- Plenty of gas.
  - The **extra weight** will make it **easier to control your vehicle.**
  - Try not to ride with less than a half a tank.
- Tire chains.
- Jumper cables.
- Batteries and electronic charging equipment.
  - If you get stranded, you don't want dead batteries to prevent you from getting help.

## Sign Up for Weather Alerts

Checking the weather forecasts before you plan your route could help you to avoid harsh weather. But sometimes conditions will change suddenly.

**By signing up for weather alerts on your smartphone or email, you might be able to avoid changing conditions by altering your route.** This could also help you to avoid traffic delays or road closures, which can cause big setbacks.

## Check Your Equipment

Most commercial drivers are required to complete a [pre-trip inspection](#) of their vehicle. But when conditions are bad, you might want to inspect your vehicle more frequently and take a few extra precautions, including:

- Making sure the weight of your load is evenly distributed.
  - If your product shifts on icy roads, it'll make it more difficult to control your vehicle.
- Treating your fuel.
  - Freezing temperatures often cause diesel fuel to congeal.
  - Treat your fuel with an anti-gel once cold weather hits.
- Having extra wiper blades handy.
- Making sure your headlights, brake lights, and hazard lights are clear of snow whenever you stop.
- Making sure you maintain as much visibility as possible by keeping your windows and mirrors clean and free of ice.

## Control Your Speed & Avoid Skidding

**Ice and snow will decrease the traction of your tires, which will make sudden stops and turns more difficult.** To stay safe, **decrease your speed and increase your following distance.** This will give you more reaction time and make hydroplaning less likely. It may also be a good idea to turn off your cruise control and adjust your speed frequently according to the conditions.

Similarly, sudden braking can cause them to lock and your truck to skid. This is never a good idea—and can be especially dangerous in foul weather. **If you do begin to skid, remember to:**

- **Pump the brakes.**
  - Locking up your brakes will make things worse.
- **Shift to neutral.**
- Control the truck by **turning the wheel in the direction** where you'd like to go.
- At the **end of the skid, put the truck in gear** instead of coming to a stop.
  - Remember to **accelerate slowly** to keep your traction.

## Watch Out for Trouble Spots

When it's raining, snowing, or the temps are below freezing, the roads will be even more dangerous. In bad weather, take extra caution when you encounter:

- **Exit ramps.**
  - A turn that's too sharp or taken at too high of a speed could cause you to lose control if the road is slippery.
- **Bridges.**

- These surfaces are the first to freeze.
- **Black ice.**
  - This transparent ice often looks like nothing more than a wet road.
  - Look for these spots when temperatures are near freezing.
- **Intersections.**
  - Brake early when you see stop signs or red lights.
- **Windy areas.**

#### Maintain Tire Traction

Awareness of your speed, accelerations, and braking can help you keep from losing your tire traction on the road when turning and stopping. A few other tips to keep in mind:

- **Stay away from the tire tracks of other vehicles.**
  - Packed snow is more likely to cause your wheels to spin.
- **Make any accelerations gradually.**
- **Decrease your speed.**
  - The higher the speed, the easier it will be to lose your traction.
- **Don't use your Jake brake.**
  - Since this brake controls only the tractor and not the trailer, taking your foot away from the accelerator can make the trailer slide out and cause a jack knife.

#### Don't Be Afraid to Stop

If conditions get really bad, don't let the pressure of delivering your shipment on time get in the way of your judgment. **Whenever driving conditions become unsafe, pull off the road and wait.** Pushing through on roads that haven't been plowed or a storm that's taken a turn for the worse will cause more problems in the long run than reaching your destination a little late.

#### Get Help

If an emergency does occur, here's what you should remember:

- **Don't let anxiety get the best of you.**
  - Modern technology will make it very likely that someone will know where you are, even if you've lost cell phone or radio reception.
- **Make a call, if possible.**
  - Keep your cell phone and computer charged just in case you need to make an emergency call in bad weather.
- **Stay inside.**
  - Leaving your truck to look for help can put you in a bad situation.
  - Having extra food and clothing will help you to wait things out inside the truck until help arrives.