

When
WINTER
bites...



Can you reduce the pressure?

It's not just pressure on the brake and accelerator than can cause problems when driving on winter roads

– it's pressure on you and your company!

Customers still want their deliveries on time. Passengers still expect to get to their destination whatever the weather.

Everyone needs to make allowances for severe weather and give themselves extra time.



Whatever the pressure, your safety is more important than anything.

Plan for bad weather and warn your customers and passengers

Check the forecast routinely: for the entire area of your operation, return journeys and several days ahead. This will allow you and your fleet manager to plan around any bad weather.

The Met Office produces specific weather forecasts for the Highways Agency network and you can get special alerts for high-sided and other vulnerable vehicles.

By telling people in advance that your journey may

be affected by bad weather, it can help reduce time pressures – and allow you to complete the journey in safety.

Advance warning of severe weather also gives your customers notice of any preparations they need to make to accept a delivery. They may need to clear the delivery bay of snow for example, or grit the access ramp.



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Be prepared

Carry all the equipment you need and don't be tempted to rush pre-journey checks of your vehicle. A thorough check is even more important when you are about to set off through difficult conditions.

Warm clothing, winter footwear and a good torch

You'll need these for doing the external check of your vehicle in the cold and dark, without being tempted to jump back into a warm cab before the job is done.

Be sure to wear gloves and a hat – most body heat escapes through the head. It's a good idea to have two pairs of gloves – so there's always one pair drying in the cab.

Straps, pins and catches will be cold to the touch and harder to adjust in freezing weather. If you need to pull hard on straps, for example, avoid injury by warming up your muscles first! The same goes for loading passenger luggage into the hold.

See and be seen

Before you set off make sure all windows, lights, plates and reflective markings are clean and clear of ice. Wipers and de-misters should be a part of your standard check.

Take care getting in and out of the cab

Clear steps, footholds and handrails of ice, so you don't slip. Remember the three points of contact rule when climbing up to a cab. Also, when getting down, check your footing first – and be especially careful not to jump down onto what could be a slippery surface.

For coach drivers, make sure the steps are clear for passengers and warn them to be careful when boarding in snow and icy conditions.

Check the loading

When the driving conditions are difficult you want to be reassured that your load is stable and the weight evenly distributed.

Remember that as the load changes between pick-ups and deliveries, the handling of your vehicle changes. With a heavier load, you have better traction. With a lighter load or empty truck you are more likely to get blown off course by strong winds.

Empty curtain-sided trailers are less likely to get blown over if you open the sides when driving in windy conditions.

Beware the cosy cab and café

You need to keep warm of course – but be aware that you are more prone to fatigue when your body faces changes of temperature several times a day. Another good reason to wrap up warm whenever you venture outside, even for short periods.

Overnight stops

If you're sleeping in the cab, do above all make sure you are well-prepared for the night time temperatures. Take all the blankets, flask and sleeping bag with you even if you're not planning an overnight stop – just in case you get stuck.

Remember to keep checking the weather forecast, so you know what sort of night lies ahead and what conditions to expect in the morning.

Especially if it's snowing you'll need to allow extra time to clear and check your vehicle before you set off again.



Driving through snow and ice

The Highways Agency looks after England's motorways and major A roads, and local authorities look after all the other roads. Both work as hard as they can to keep their networks clear during severe weather.

Stick to the main roads where you can and avoid exposed routes.

You should drive with care and respect the road conditions wherever you drive, but not every road can be treated. You need to take even more care driving on minor roads.

Even if the time and location of snowfall is perfectly forecast, it will still take time to clear the snow after it has fallen. Remember though, snow ploughs can't get through if the road or motorway is full of stationary traffic, so give Highways Agency and local authority teams the space they need to do their job and help you on your journey!

Steep hills and exposed roads are also likely to present more challenging driving conditions in snow and ice, so if you could avoid these it might make your journey easier.

Even on the easier inclines, regaining traction can be difficult if you are forced to stop. Compensate

The gritters will often be out at night and that's when the temperatures are coldest and driving conditions most difficult.

for poor traction by slowing down and making all movements gently - never drive faster than conditions allow and don't use cruise control in snow and ice. Remember you will have less traction when travelling empty.

Leave more room between you and the vehicle in front. Double or even triple your following distance to at least a ten second gap and never tailgate. Greater anticipation and awareness of other road users is the key.

Take even more care looking out for others that may not be able to stop and be extra cautious at road junctions where road markings may not be visible.

Driving in rain and floods

When the road is wet it can take twice as long to stop. Slow down and maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front.

If your vehicle loses grip, or "aquaplanes", on surface water take your foot off the accelerator to slow down. Do not brake or steer suddenly because you have less control of the steering and brakes.

When faced with a flooded road, be very careful as you can't always tell how deep the water is. Don't

think that because you are in a big vehicle you will always get through when cars are getting stuck!

If you have no alternative but to drive through floods, drive slowly, use a low gear and try to keep the engine revving at a high rate. Move forward continuously to avoid stalling the engine. When driving an automatic vehicle, engage and hold in a low gear. And remember to test your brakes after driving through water; they may be ineffective.

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Driving in fog

In reduced visibility, where you cannot see as much of the road ahead, you will need to slow down and drive more carefully. Use dipped headlights so that other drivers can see you.

Fog lights and full beam can dazzle other drivers. Use fog lights when it's really thick (less than 100m

visibility) and then don't forget to turn them off when conditions improve.

Fog is often patchy so try not to speed up as soon as visibility improves. You could suddenly find yourself back in thick fog further up the road.

Driving in windy weather

Take extra care on the roads and plan your journey by checking the latest weather conditions. The traffic news, overhead motorway signs and Highways Agency digital information services will say if any roads or bridges are closed because of high winds.

You are likely to be more affected by high winds and sometimes roads or bridges will be closed to high-sided vehicles. The Highways Agency issues alerts specifically for the freight industry, identifying vulnerable locations. An amber alert means take extra care. A red alert means park up and wait for conditions to improve.

Be aware how certain stretches of road can be particularly affected by windy weather – such as open stretches of road exposed to strong crosswinds, or when passing bridges, other vehicles or gaps in trees.

You are more likely to be blown of course when travelling empty or with a lighter load. Curtain sides should be opened when empty, so there's less to catch the wind.

Finally, remember it's not just you that can be affected. Watch out for other vehicles being blown off course and give everyone more room.

Drive carefully – according to the conditions

Always respect the weather. No deadline is more important than your safety.

Don't take risks with your cargo and especially not with you or your passengers' safety.

You may be driving one of the biggest vehicles on the road, with lots of sophisticated equipment, but that does not make you invincible.

Don't ask your truck or coach to do more than it can. If you don't feel comfortable driving, park up, call in and wait until conditions improve.