

EMS Safety Bulletin: Safe Winter Driving Tips

1) **Check and maintain vehicle condition –**

On a regular basis (minimum daily or weekly depending on level of activity) check:

- **Tires** – Check for proper inflation, good tread, no visible damage. Check condition of spare tire too if provided. Encourage members to check their personal vehicle tires regularly also.
- **Tire Chains** – Automatic or old style chains should be readily available and in good condition. Make sure your agency has clear guidelines on when chains should be used.
- **Vehicle Fluids** – Check oil, coolant and windshield wiper fluid and top off as needed. Be sure antifreeze is sufficient to protect the cooling system and not freeze and that windshield wiper fluid is rated not to freeze.
- **Wipers** – Check blades for condition and replace as needed. Be sure they make good contact with the windshield.
- **Windows** – Winter weather can obscure windows and mirrors quickly. Clean them regularly and after each run. Be sure to wipe the inside of windows too to remove buildup from condensation and heater/defroster systems. Check and clean all mirrors too!
- **Battery** – Check vehicle battery for proper charging and condition.
- **Lights** – Be sure all lights are working and clean. Newer LED emergency lights do not generate enough heat to prevent the buildup of snow or ice under certain conditions. Carry a snowbrush or tool long enough to reach all lights to clear them as needed.
- **Siren** – Keep snow out of siren speakers and clear out as necessary to allow full volume when responding.

2) **Emergency Responses**

Winter weather creates hazardous driving conditions. Ice, snow, slush on roadways and limited visibility due to falling snow or sleet make emergency responses even more dangerous than usual. Remind emergency vehicle drivers to:

- **Slow Down!** – Anytime you're dealing with wet pavement you should reduce travel speeds. If snow is accumulating, slow down even more and anticipate other drivers reacting poorly to emergency vehicles approaching them. Use a lower gear to reduce speed on hills or extremely slippery areas. Know your vehicle braking system and apply the brakes properly for the type system on board. Anti-lock Braking Systems equipped vehicles require steady pressure on the brake pedal to slow down and stop while older style braking systems might require the driver to pump the brakes to keep the steering wheels from locking up.
- **Corners, Intersections and steep grades** – Each requires more caution during winter weather conditions than when dry. Approach slowly, watch for other out of control vehicles reacting to the sudden appearance of an emergency vehicle and make all turns slowly – no sudden turns!
- **Response routes** – Choose response routes to avoid steep hills or busy intersections whenever possible and try to use posted snow routes which may be in better condition than secondary routes.

Sources: www.FireEngineering.com, www.EmergencyVehicleResponse.com & NHTSA

