

Winter Driving Safety

Winter in the Colorado mountains presents a variety of driving challenges. Depending on the weather, you might find yourself dealing with ice, snow, mud, loose dirt/gravel, or may end up moving between several of these conditions during a trip. The following safety tips apply to all of these road conditions. Please keep them in mind!

- **Slow down.** The thing ice, snow, mud, and loose dirt/gravel all have in common is that they make the driving surface unstable. In addition, moving between these conditions presents an additional challenge, as each of them handles slightly differently. The one thing you can do that'll be helpful on all four conditions is to **slow down**! You have a lot more control over what you're doing when you take it easy. Anticipate when a change in speed may be necessary, plan ahead so you can slow gradually, and always slow down when approaching corners.
- **Avoid sudden changes in direction**, such as swerving to avoid objects or animals in the road. This can be particularly dangerous if you're going too fast for conditions. This applies whether we're talking about a critter running into the road or merely making that next turn. Most of the unpaved roads in our area are banked for optimal water runoff, not optimal driving safety. This means that the forces working on your car as you round a corner may be pushing you off the roadway, rather than keeping you on it. These forces are stronger at higher speeds, so again, slow down.
- **Accelerate and brake gently** and reduce your speed when approaching corners, curves and hills. If you try to accelerate quickly, you're likely to skid and either lose control or end up spinning your wheels (and potentially getting stuck), so start off slow and easy. Always drive at a speed that allows you to stop easily for any hazard without slamming on the brakes. Your brakes will be less effective in all these road conditions, and it'll likely take longer to stop than usual (and longer than you expect).
- **Increase following distance.** Even if visibility and road conditions appear good, increase your following distance to reduce the necessity of stopping suddenly. Also, be a considerate sharer of the road. As you approach other vehicles, slow down and move to the right so you can pass each other safely. Most of our roads have borrow ditches on at least one side, and in the winter, any of them may be lined with snowbanks or deep snow (which in addition to being a hazard in of itself, may conceal the borrow ditch), all of which you naturally want to stay out of, but driving in the middle of the road, where you risk either hitting someone else or running them off the road, is not the solution. What is the solution, you ask? All together now: slow down.

If your vehicle starts to skid, let off on the accelerator or brakes. Do not overcorrect! As you slow down, look where you want to go and steer the vehicle gently in that direction. If your tires drop off the road on one side, do not turn the wheel hard to try to get back on the road – this can cause you to roll the car. Slow down and steer gradually back toward the road.

In high winds – Never have any of that around here, do we? Keep both hands on the wheel at all times – you never know when there's going to be a strong gust and it's much easier to keep control than to try to get it back. Keep your speed down (what, again? yes, again!) – the faster you're going, the easier it is for a gust to push you out of your lane or off the road and the further off you'll be pushed.

Also, please remember – we're in Colorado, it's winter, and Crystal Lakes is in the mountains. If you do not have four-wheel drive (and even if you do!), make sure you have chains with you and know how and when to put them on. Keep warm clothes in your car in case you get stuck, do not try to drive through snow drifts (you never know how deep they are or what's underneath), and DO NOT leave your car if you get stuck. You're far safer and easier to find in the car than outside in the elements.

This graphic offers some additional winter driving tips to keep in mind:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BUrB7zhsVj7vQlpO_bhnm5rrh3Uend_I/view?usp=sharing

Please drive smart and be safe, thank you!

Crystal Lakes Volunteer Fire Department | www.clvfd.org