

Insurance 101

Wintery Mix: Snow, Ice and Bad Driving

Being on the road when there's ice and snow is tough enough. Don't add dangerous driving practices into the mix in winter or anytime. Be smart behind the wheel and stay safe with these tips:

Not the tailgating that's fun. In a recent survey, nearly all polled identified these as aggressive driving:

- Tailgating
- Passing on the shoulder
- Pulling into a parking space someone else is waiting for
- Failing to yield to merging traffic

Are any of these part of your driving style?

Be on the defensive. You may be the best driver in the world, but you shouldn't expect the same from those around you. One way to avoid an accident is ensure a safe driving distance from the car in front. Here's a tip: watch the vehicle ahead pass a fixed point, such as a sign or tree. Say to yourself, "1001 and 1002" (the equivalent of two seconds). If you reach the mark before you get to "1002," you're following too closely.

Bad driver near you? Watch for the signs: tailgating, inconsistent signaling, abrupt turns, swerves and speeding. If you see any of these, steer clear.

Leave early, arrive late. To help reduce stress on the road, build in plenty of time to get where you need to go. When you're not rushed, you're more likely to be more relaxed and better able to concentrate on your driving.

Texting isn't the only risk. Distractions can include passenger chatter, noises inside or outside the car, sharp angle of the sun or fatigue. If you fiddle with the radio or CD player, heat or air conditioning, mirrors or seat position while you're driving, you're not giving the road your full attention. It's best to pull over until you can.

Dark dangers. According to the National Safety Council, vehicle death rates at night are three times higher than during the day. Darkness challenges depth perception, peripheral vision and color recognition—and does so at a time when our eyes may be growing weary.

You can improve your night driving by:

- Keeping headlights on one hour before dusk and one hour after dawn
- Properly aligning headlights
- Ensuring signal and brake lights are working
- Cleaning the windshield to reduce glare
- Not overdriving your headline beams

Sources: Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Department of Motor Vehicles, Florida Department of Motor Vehicles