

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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Happy New Year! What a welcome we got; rain, freezing rain and then snow; a little something for everyone, right? It sure didn't take long to be reminded of how quickly weather conditions can change in Iowa. Last week, our son had only two school days because of weather related school cancellations. That gave him and his little sister ample time to play in the new snow. However, what is fun for them can be a challenge for others. We knew good driving conditions couldn't last all winter. With the certainty of more hazardous driving conditions ahead of us, I thought it might be a good idea to review safe driving tips.

The first step is to be sure that your car is prepared for the winter. You may want to first check the battery and ignition system to be sure it has proper starting capability (this may include cleaning and identifying the + and – battery terminals). Next, check the wipers, defroster, windshield washer, lights and hazard lights to be sure all are working properly. Be sure the windshield washer fluid is topped off and perhaps you will want to carry extra in the trunk. It is important to check the exhaust system, heater, and brakes to assure proper operation and change oil to a recommended winter grade. Check tires to be sure there is adequate tread (no less than 2/32 inch). You may want to consider all season or snow tires. Be sure that you have a windshield scraper and small broom for ice and snow removal.

If you are caught in a winter storm, or must travel, keep the following tips in mind.

Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season. Plan long trips carefully.

Listen to the radio, call the state highway patrol, or check the internet for the latest road conditions. Always travel in the daylight, and if possible take a passenger with you.

Remove all snow and ice from windows, headlights and taillights before you drive. Keep a supply of high energy bars and bottles of water with you in the car. You may also want to keep the following items in the car: flashlight with extra batteries, first aid kit with pocket knife, several blankets or sleeping bags, plastic bags for sanitation, matches, an extra set of mittens, socks and a wool cap, small shovel, booster cables, set of tire chains, traction mats and a small sack of sand for generating traction under the wheels, and a brightly colored cloth to use as a flag.

If you get stranded in a blizzard, you will want to stay with your car unless help is visible within one hundred yards. Start the car's engine and run it for about ten minutes every hour along with the heater. Be sure the exhaust pipe is clear of snow and open a down wind window slightly for ventilation to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. It is suggested to do minor exercises in order to keep up circulation. Newspapers, maps and even floor mats can be used for additional insulation. Watch for signs of frostbite and hyperthermia and avoid overexertion.

The use of common sense and following the above recommendations will help to make winter travel safer and more enjoyable. If you have any questions regarding safe winter traveling tips, call the ISU Extension office in Grundy County at 319-824-6979.