

It's not just ice and snow. Dark cloudy skies and roads slick with rain are part of the winter driving season, especially in the city. Be prepared.

# Reduce speed. Winter driving season ahead

By Gord Woodward

B.C.'s winter driving season brings some of the most dangerous months for people who drive for work. This includes those who drive in the city in rain and fog, and those who drive on the highways in snow and sleet.

As inclement and potentially unsafe weather conditions roll in, employers need to address the potential risks and hazards workers face behind the wheel.

"Employers have obligations to ensure the health and safety of workers who drive for work purposes," says Kevin Bennett, WorkSafeBC's industry specialist for transportation and occupational road safety. "This is especially critical during the winter months."

Work-related crashes increase dramatically at this time of year. October through December is the most dangerous stretch of time, accounting for almost 30 percent of all work-related crashes resulting in injury and claims for time loss.

Snow is just one of the factors affecting driving conditions. Rain, fog, and ice also create hazards. Light rain mixed with residual oil can make road conditions slick, and heavy rain creates conditions ideal for

hydroplaning. And there's a reason that this time of year you hear the words "black ice" thrown about. Ice is often unseen. It quickly forms on roads in shaded areas and on bridges and overpasses and stays frozen long after the sun has risen. Sections of road that appear black and shiny can frost over, causing a vehicle to suddenly lose traction. Mix in less daylight hours and the dangers of driving in winter begin to stack.

To protect staff who drive for work, employers need to:

- Develop a driving safety policy and written safe work practices or procedures.
- Make workers aware of all work-related driving hazards and give them the information, instruction, training, and supervision necessary to ensure their safety.
- Conduct regular vehicle inspections and remedy any hazardous conditions.

"Your obligations are the same whether employees are driving a vehicle owned or leased by your company or one they own themselves," Bennett says. "Whether you have a fleet of truckers hauling your goods or one person making sales calls outside your office, you have a responsibility to keep them safe."

Here are five key points to cover in your driving safety policy:

**1 Use the proper equipment**

Ensure that vehicles are fit for the intended purpose and comply with all requirements for highway travel, such as properly inflated winter tires in good condition (with a minimum of 3.5 mm tread depth). “This is important even if you live in an area with little snow,” says Bennett. “Winter tires have improved handling and performance characteristics and have improved stopping distance, which can be critical in intersections, where there’s a risk of injury to pedestrians.”

**2 Determine when work-related driving is necessary**

Conduct work by email, conference calls, or online meetings to eliminate driving risks when roads are hazardous. If workers have to travel, use public transit. If that’s not possible, adjust schedules so workers aren’t driving in the dark and consider alternate routes to avoid hazardous areas. “Give people enough time to get to their destination without rushing.”

**3 Require drivers to slow down**

“Conditions change and so should the speeds driven by workers,” Bennett says. Slowing down gives drivers more time to react to situations involving black ice, pedestrians, snowplows, traffic

control persons, and other road users. “Educate and remind workers about safe speeds and safe following distances during rain and snow or icy and foggy conditions.”

**4 Make weather-related adjustments to trip planning**

Always evaluate road and weather conditions, especially when temperatures are between 5°C and -5°C. That’s when black ice can form. Check the weather forecast and [drivebc.com](http://drivebc.com) for information on highway conditions. “If conditions are unsafe or worsening,” Bennett advises, “cancel, re-schedule, or re-route trips.” Also ensure that drivers follow working-alone procedures and know written emergency procedures in case of an incident.

**5 Support positive driving behaviours**

Unsafe behaviours such as aggressive driving, inattention, impairment, or fatigue can significantly increase the likelihood of a crash. “Create conditions that will improve driver safety performance, such as not obliging workers to pick up work calls or text messages when they are behind the wheel,” adds Bennett.

As a best practice, employers should evaluate their safe driving measures annually or following a motor vehicle incident.

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**CONTACT US**

Mike Roberts, Executive Director  
P: 778-278-3486 F: 778-278-0029  
E: [mroberts@bcmsa.ca](mailto:mroberts@bcmsa.ca)



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