



# *Fall Driving Tips*

Fall weather can mean poor visibility for drivers. Follow our advice to steer clear of danger.

The mists, colors and waning light of the autumn delight us at the same time the encroaching bite of winter alarms us. It seems strange, but the same qualities that make the season such a magical time can also cause fog, rain, and diminishing light. When you're driving, this kind of weather dictates extreme caution.

With autumn's shorter days, many people find themselves driving to and from work in the grayness of pre-dawn and twilight. To improve your vision, you have to allow your eyes time to adjust to the environment. Before moving from a brightly lit area onto a dimly lit road, give your eyes several minutes to get used to the change. Wear sunglasses at dawn and dusk to reduce glare, but never wear them at night.

Spend the time checking and cleaning your headlights. Headlight dirt or misaim can reduce the distance a driver can detect objects at night by about thirty percent.

When driving at night, the lack of light demands slower speeds. A good rule of thumb is to always drive at least ten miles per hour slower than the speed limit - even more slowly if the weather is bad. And never overdrive your headlights.

To avoid interior glare, turn down your dash lights. If an approaching driver won't lower his high-beams, you can handle this glare by not looking directly ahead. Instead, reduce your speed and keep your eyes on the right margin of the road, or on a lane marker or the oil drip down the center of your lane. Your peripheral vision will pick up the rest. If you are using high-beams yourself, lower them if there's an oncoming vehicle within 500 feet, or at least 300 feet before you overtake a vehicle.

Every precaution about driving in dim light goes double when it comes to fog. If you don't have to drive in fog, don't. The first thing to do if you see a patch of fog or mist ahead of you is to slow down gradually. If you slow down too suddenly, the driver behind you may crash into you.

Next, turn on your low-beam headlights, both to help you see and to help others to see you. Turn on your wipers and your defroster to get rid of mist on both sides of your windshield. You may want to roll the side window down part way so that you can hear any road noises. Be especially alert for cars that have pulled off to the shoulder.

Many drivers mistakenly believe that the safest policy in fog is to keep within sight of the taillights of the vehicle in front of you. While that driver can see things you can't, and thus blaze a trail for you, you're risking a collision if you get too close. Many accidents in fog are pile-ups caused by a caravan of cars without enough of an interval between them.

It's always wise to maintain a large open space around you as far from other traffic as possible. In bad weather, you should certainly use other vehicles to help you follow the twists and turns of the road, but you also need an extra large buffer zone to compensate for the conditions.

Sometimes the fog is so thick that you can have serious visibility problems. For example, if you can't see past your hood ornament, then you should pull off the road. Leave your headlights on, and put on your interior lights and flashers. Sound your horn from time to time.

Autumn rains aren't just depressing -- they're dangerous. Rain decreases visibility, so all of the rules for poor visibility should be followed. Keep a special eye out for pedestrians. They are harder to see in the rain, and they're also less likely to see you when they're huddled under umbrellas and dodging puddles.

As with any danger, it's best to prepare ahead of time for rain. Inspect your wiper blades for wear and test the wiper mechanism. It's also smart to keep a few paper towels in your car to clean the blades with. Make sure you have enough windshield washing fluid, to clean spots left by the rain.



Good tires are critical to your survival in a rainstorm. Check your tires for proper tread depth. Grooves should be at least one-sixteenth of an inch deep. One way to check this is by inserting a penny into a groove. If the top of Lincoln's head shows, it means the grooves are not deep enough.

If your tires aren't in good condition, then you're in danger of hydroplaning. Hydroplaning occurs when the water in front of your tires builds-up faster than your car's weight can move it out of the way. The water pressure causes your car to rise up and ride on a thin layer of water between your tires and the road. When your tires lose contact, you're in serious danger of skidding out of control. To avoid hydroplaning, slow down when the roads are wet, and stay away from puddles. Try to drive in the tire tracks left by the cars in front of you, but don't tailgate.

If you find yourself hydroplaning, don't brake or turn suddenly. The lack of friction between your tires and the road will throw your car into a skid. Ease your foot off the gas until the car slows and you can feel the road again. If you need to brake, do it gently, with light pumping actions. To get out of a skid, remain calm, ease your foot off the gas, and carefully steer in the direction you want the car to go. This will bring the back end into line with the front. Avoid using the brakes.

It's best, though, to prevent hydroplaning and skids in the first place. Drive slowly in rainy weather, and allow yourself twice the following distance you'd maintain on a dry road. Beware of wet leaves--they can be as slippery as ice.

Large puddles pose another water hazard. They can hide potholes, or, worse, get your brakes damp. Go through puddles slowly, with one foot lightly on your brake. This will keep enough friction between the lining and the drum to prevent the brakes from getting damp. Also, if the water level is above the bottom of your hubcaps, don't drive through it. Water that deep can get into your engine compartment and cause significant damage.

Enjoying autumn means respecting the season as well. When you drive this fall, keep safety in mind--and you'll appreciate this special time of the year even more.