



PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

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NEWS

Motorists urged to use caution on wet roads

HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO – With the snow and ice of another Cincinnati winter behind us, many drivers take road conditions for granted. However, rain and wet roads contribute to nearly a million crashes nationwide annually, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, many of which are preventable if only motorists understood the distinction between driving on wet versus dry roads.

“The biggest difference between driving on wet roads is the amount of available traction, which affects the handling and reaction of your vehicle,” said New Driver Car Control Clinic’s District Manager Ed Haines. “Drivers don’t take into consideration how a vehicle is going to react differently due to road conditions.”

What can drivers do to stay safe on the roads during and after a downpour?

Slow down—allow more travel time if needed. When you drive slowly, a greater amount of your tire's tread will be on the road, resulting in better traction. Additionally, try to drive at a steady pace and avoid jerky movements when braking, accelerating, or turning.

Exercise extreme caution after a long dry spell. Over time, engine oil and grease build up on the road when the weather is dry. When mixed with water from the rain, the road becomes extremely slick. As the rain continues the oil will wash away, but the first few hours can be the most dangerous.

Drive toward the middle of the road. Most of America's roads are crowned in the middle, which means that the water will run off to the sides. Keeping your car in the middle of the road will help to avoid deep standing puddles.

Turn on your headlights. In light rain and in gloomy, foggy, or overcast conditions, this will help you to help you see the road and help other drivers see you.

Brake earlier and with reduced force. This action increases the stopping distance between you and the car in front of you and lets the driver behind you know that you are slowing down. Better yet, take your foot off the accelerator to slow down.

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Maintain the proper following distance. It takes up to three times longer to stop on wet roads. This is true even if your tires are good-quality wet-weather tires. So don't tailgate, and be alert for brake lights on the car in front of you. We have heard of the two second following rule—this needs to be increased in wet weather because a stopping suddenly on a wet road is one of the leading causes of crashes. Keeping the appropriate distance will also help you avoid the tire spray from vehicles ahead of you, which can reduce vision.

Stay on top of your car's condition. Regularly check brakes, tire pressures, tire tread depth, windshield wipers and defroster operation so that you are not caught unprepared.

Avoid driving through puddles and standing water. Not only could there be a suspension- or tire-damaging pothole hiding underneath, just a small amount of water can cause serious damage to a modern vehicle's electrical system. If you do drive through water, it is recommended that you tap the breaks to remove the water from the car's rotors.

Hydroplaning is a common cause of crashes and skidding in wet weather. This occurs when the water in front of the tires builds up faster than the vehicle's weight can push it out of the way. The water pressure causes the vehicle to rise up and glide across the water's surface. At this point, the tires can be completely out of contact with the road and in danger of skidding or drifting out of the lane.

If this happens, the driver should take his or her foot off the gas pedal without braking excessively, according to Haines. Less speed means the tires will have less water to deal with and the car will eventually regain contact with the road. Additionally, turn the steering wheel in the direction of the skid. As you recover control, gently straighten the wheels into the direction that you want to go.

Although wet roads will affect your ability to drive safely, following these tips will make you much more likely to arrive at your destination safely and without incident.

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The New Driver Car Control Clinic, developed by championship-winning racing driver and automotive journalist David Thompson, is a hands-on, in-car training that enables new drivers to test their reactions to real-life circumstances that replicate those they will experience in the three seconds immediately preceding a crash. Unique to Car Control is the requirement that a parent attends and participates in the discussion and in-car exercises with their teens.