

NEW DRIVERS

DRIVING IN BAD WEATHER CONDITIONS

ERNIE BERTOTHY: Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Ernie Bertothy, Infocast Editor.

With us today is **Mary Lynch**, a Division Manager within the DMV's Branch Operations Division who is here today to talk about driving in bad weather.

ERNIE BERTOTHY: Well, Mary, thank you very much for joining us today to talk about driving in bad weather conditions. And the first condition we're going to talk about is driving in the rain, and when you think about the rain, certainly visibility becomes an issue. Can you just talk about the issue of visibility when driving in the rain?

MARY LYNCH: Most of what you do in driving depends on what you see. To be a good driver, you need to be able to see well. The single biggest contributor to crashes is failing to see what is happening. Obviously, with driving in the rain, you know, a very heavy down pouring rain affects the visibility that you have within the windshield of the vehicle.

If it's a very heavy rain, sometimes your wipers can't even keep up with keeping that windshield clear. What I would recommend is just be aware of what's around you, cars in front of you, cars behind you. People and individuals walking on the sidewalks are getting ready to cross the street because in bad weather, rain or any other kind of inclement weather, people tend to dash, dash for their vehicle or dash for the location that they're going to to get in out of the rain.

With any inclement weather, your headlights are required by state statute to be on at all times. That is imperative. That's so that people around you can see you and what is coming at them as well.

ERNIE: Can you talk about the importance of following distance when driving in the rain?

MARY LYNCH: In driving in the rain and on wet roads, you really need to reduce your speed by about 10 miles per hour. Your stopping distance isn't going to be as good as it would be on a normal dry day. It takes you about double the time to stop a vehicle on wet or slippery roads than it normally would. On a good dry day it's about two seconds. On a wet day or a snowy day and icy day, you're talking a minimum of four seconds. And a lot of times I would recommend that you leave more distance than that because you never know what's under there, what's under that puddle of water you might be driving through at that time.

ERNIE: And speaking of driving on water, can you explain exactly what hydroplaning is, Mary?

MARY LYNCH: Hydroplaning. Hydroplaning is where like a puddle forms and you hit it and it's almost as if you've become airborne. You don't have the control of the vehicle that you would normally have. You know, maybe it's the tires, the traction. All of that plays key when you drive in any kind of inclement weather. But hydroplaning, it's honestly a scary thought that one minute you're driving on a hard road. The next minute, you really have no control over the vehicle that you're driving.

ERNIE: So certainly, you want to remember to be visible, to drive at a safe following distance and be sure that you're driving at a proper speed when driving in the rain.

Let's talk about the snow, Mary. We're in Connecticut. You certainly can't avoid snow in the winter. What should drivers be thinking about when they have to drive in the snow?

MARY LYNCH: First of all, I would tell you if you have to drive in the snow, again, leave more than enough room between you and the vehicle in front of you. It's key. It's key to your stopping distance and your safety as well as those around you.

When you're driving on packed snow, you should really cut your speed by half. It includes highways, your city driving, town driving because, again, you don't know what's under that snow. You can approach a stop sign and think, oh, I only need four seconds to stop, but if there's ice under that, you're not stopping at that stop sign chances are. You're going to slide into it and you don't know what's coming around you. Slow down.

You know, if you don't have to go out in the snow, don't. Stay home. Stay at work. Just because it snowed doesn't mean you have to be the first one out of the office. Give the road crews time to get out there and sand and do what needs to be done to the roads to make them safer for use to travel on.

ERNIE: And what about driving when it's not even snowing out. Perhaps it snowed overnight and you're going to get in your car in the morning? Talk about how important it is to make sure your car is completely clean before getting on the roadway.

MARY LYNCH: Ernie brings up a very good point there. That's an imperative thing. I think a lot of people, and, you know, all of us at times, we're all in a rush. You clear the windshield. You clear what you've got to clear, your windshield, your windows and your mirrors.

But what about the roof of the car? What about the trunk? You know, it's not so much for you that that helps, but that helps the drivers behind you, the ones around you. That's a courteous thing because think about you driving down 91 or 84 and all the sudden the car in front of you didn't take the time to clear and all the snow comes right back at you and your windshield. You may not have the time to respond the way you need to with the windshield wipers and people around you. The next thing you know, he might have slid on his brakes and you run into the back end of him.

Again, take the time, not only for your safety, but for passenger's safety, the people around you, to clear the vehicle and be extra cautious in weather like that.

ERNIE: So certainly you should use your discretion before deciding to drive in the snow. And when you do have to drive on snow, cut your speed at least in half. And certainly, visibility in clearing off your windows and car are certainly the utmost importance.

And sticking with the winter weather theme, let's talk about ice for a second. And obviously, Mary, that is not an ideal condition to be driving in. Can you talk about what drivers should remember if, in fact, they encounter ice or have to drive in ice?

MARY LYNCH: Again, ice is the most treacherous of road conditions probably, especially overpasses and bridges and other types of areas like that. They freeze first and they're the last to dry out. There are very heavy icy spots, and you don't always see them. Sometimes it's ice that's referred to commonly as black ice. You almost think it's wet blacktop. That's just wet. But when you hit it, it's the thinnest ice you can imagine, but it's also very slippery and could cause serious harm to you or others.

ERNIE: And black ice is something, Mary, that you don't even necessarily see. You said it may look like a wet spot, but it might just seem like clear pavement to you.

MARY LYNCH: Exactly. Especially newer paved pavement. It's a lot harder to identify it there too because again, it could be shiny on new pavement, but so is the whole road.

ERNIE: And what do you recommend, Mary, if you're driving -- if you have to drive on ice, how should you maneuver the vehicle?

MARY LYNCH: Again, I would recommend if you don't have to drive, don't drive. If it's an emergency, you have to drive, then you have to crawl. You have to slow the vehicle down to a crawl. And if that means going 5 to 10 miles an hour, that's the way it is. If it's that important that you get there, whether it takes you 10 minutes to get there or three hours to get there, if you have to go, then you have to adjust your speed for the conditions.

Probably the best thing that I can really recommend for more information on these subjects is either go online and check out the Driver's Manual, or pick up a copy in your local office. There's good points on here for driving conditions and inclement weather. No one's too old or too young to read this manual and just stay up on top of what's going on.

I would ask anyone that gets behind the wheel of a car in any kind of inclement weather or any day to take the care and caution that needs to be taken in driving because it's not only you that it may affect, but there's a lot of people around you, be it passengers or pedestrians, little children that might run out on the road after that ball. Think of what's behind you, in front of you, and at your sides and drive safely.

ERNIE: Mary, thank you very much for joining us today and talking about driving in bad weather conditions.

MARY LYNCH: Thank you, Ernie.

ERNIE BERTOTHY: This has been an Infocast produced by the State of Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. Thank you for listening.