



Patrol offers winter driving tips

BY AMANDA GOESER
Staff Reporter

With the winter weather on its way, car safety is a must.

The National Weather Service is predicting above average temperatures and above average precipitation in December, January and February this year, said George Amis, observing program leader for the National Weather Service.

Sergeant Brent Bernhardt, Troop B public information & education officer for the Missouri Highway Patrol, said drivers need to prepare for any kind of winter weather.

"Make sure, number one, that your car is mechanically ready for winter driving — make sure that your antifreeze fluid levels are good and that your antifreeze is tested to be sure it is going to be able to withstand the cold temperatures," Bernhardt said. "Make sure that you have plenty of windshield washer fluid, that your heater and defroster are working properly, and that your tires are in good shape for traction needs."

After thoroughly checking the car, Bernhardt said to keep a few important objects in your car during the winter months.

"We encourage [people] to have, of course, an ice scraper, a blanket or warm clothes, and in some cases, we encourage people to maybe get a coffee can or some other type of container with some salt or some type of

abrasive material, such as sand, and a candle to be used for warmth," Bernhardt said.

Before driving away, allow time for the car to warm up and clear the snow or ice from all of your windows to ensure visibility.

"When your engine is cold, it is trying to warm itself up," Bernhardt said. "So it could speed up — the engine could actually rev up, or the RPMs could go up to make it to where you know your vehicle would surge. And this is actually your engine trying to adjust to warm up."

Bernhardt also suggested checking the weather forecast and road conditions prior to departure. Road conditions are posted for Missouri on modot.gov — click on "Traveler Information Map." For those traveling to or through nearby states, Iowa's Web site is iowaroadconditions.org and Illinois' is dot.state.il.us. These maps show conditions, construction and possible delays on major roads.

Under any conditions, drivers should rest fully before hitting the road. A drowsy or tired driver is just as bad as an intoxicated driver, Bernhardt said. Wearing a seatbelt also is important.

"I tell people all the time that their single motivation for wearing a seatbelt shouldn't be because it is against the law [not to buckle up], it should be because it is the right thing to do," he said.

Traveling the speed limit is an-

other key to driving safely, Bernhardt said. Those who allow themselves a few miles per hour over the speed limit could be surprised to find that their speedometer might not be accurate. One of the top three contributing factors of traffic crashes nationwide is speeding.

"What happens is that speedometers, typically, are a couple miles per hour off one way or another," Bernhardt said. "... It is not an uncommon thing to have even a newer vehicle and the speedometer be off two or three miles per hour. And then there are also mechanical things that can cause your speedometer to not be accurate."

Bernhardt added that deer can present a danger to drivers as well, and suggested that drivers not veer off the road for deer. It is best to slow down, even if it means hitting the deer. If a driver swerves, the car could end up in another lane, in the line of danger with another car or into the ditch.

"Deer are on the move and certainly we have to be cognizant of that fact and realize that when we are driving, we need to be aware of what is standing in the ditches," Bernhardt said. "Typically, if you see one deer, you will see another one."

Should someone have a roadside emergency, they should get off the roadway, turn on the car's hazard lights, and stay in the car, Bernhardt said. Drivers can call *55, the Highway Patrol Emergency cell phone

number in the State of Missouri to reach the nearest troop headquarters.

"You may be the best driver out there, but there are some drivers that are not," Bernhardt said.

To avoid an emergency, when driving in any kind of snow, rain or ice, never use cruise control. Randy Brown, Missouri Department of Transportation maintenance supervisor said that if you encounter a snow plow, know it is going as fast as it safely can. The public should remember that and use that as a guide for their own speed.

"Always figure, when winter gets here, to drive the roads like they are slick, because you never know exactly what the road conditions are when you are on it, because they change so fast," Brown said. "You could have dry pavement under you and then all of a sudden, say it is wet, the temperature can drop pretty fast on you and it will freeze over like magic."

Brown said the Missouri Department of Transportation categorizes roadways as either Priority One or Two. Priority One roads are interstates and highways. Locally, Highways 63 and 6 are the first treated. Priority Twos, lettered routes and other roads, are treated next after an inch has accumulated.

Students often remember their first experience of winter driving in and around Kirksville. Senior Carrie Stephens recalls sliding down a hill and not being able to stop and said she



Winter Safety Checklist

Check anti-freeze levels and be sure the car can withstand cold temperatures

Check Windshield washer fluid

Make sure heater and de-froster are working properly

Check tires for traction

BEFORE TAKING OFF

Warm up car adequately

Clear windows

Check local forecast

Check road condition reports

Design by Antonette Bedessie/ Index

was lucky enough not to hit anything. That was not Stephens' only encounter with driving in inclement weather. About a year ago, she was traveling home in a blizzard when it got so bad she couldn't see the road at all.

"I had to stop in Columbia and park my car in a mall parking lot and my parents came and got me and took me the rest of the way," Stephens said. When she got back to her car, the snowplows had plowed it and she had to call the city to dig it out, Stephens said.

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