



## **WINTER DRIVING AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Winter often hits large parts of Texas weeks before we fully expect it. A few years ago, in mid-November, Houston saw its earliest snowfall on record and San Antonio broke its low temperature record. Places as far south as Lockhart had overnight lows in the teens with single digit lows in the Panhandle. Fortunately, there was little precipitation outside of the Houston area with this blue norther that could have snarled roads, transportation and operations everywhere.

One of the scariest things to do in winter weather is driving. Ice and snow on the road affect every function of an automobile or truck. Steering can be inexact. Stopping or turning may be out of the question and visibility is limited by windshield accumulations of ice or road spray. What can the District do to avoid problems on snow or ice covered roads?

The best advice is to not drive. If roads are snow covered or icy local authorities will caution against driving for any reason. Districts should curtail transportation until roads improve. And if conditions are bad enough, close offices and facilities that do not have to have staff working there. With all the adaptations Districts have done during the Covid-19 pandemic, some of the services offered from home can make closing some facilities an easy choice.

If member staff do have to drive, use extreme caution when accelerating or braking. Keep speed low and start stopping long before you reach an intersection or other traffic. If the vehicle starts to skid out of control, try to turn into the direction you are moving and avoid braking if possible. If the vehicle is equipped with chains, install them. It can be helpful to add additional weight in the trunk or truck bed to increase rear wheel traction. Use something heavy that will not easily slide or fly around in the event of a sudden stop or collision. If your tires lose traction and start to spin, it's a sign that you should not be driving because the conditions where you are trying to start driving are all over the roads ahead.

Make sure the windshield washer fluid is full and carry an extra gallon with you. Wiper blades that are worn or raggedy don't do a very good job of keeping windshields clean so replace them if necessary. Either start the vehicle before you need it to allow it to warm up and thaw accumulated ice or snow on glass or keep a scraper in the vehicle. It's very disconcerting to see other drivers peering through a small clear spot in their windshield as they try to drive past or behind you.

Cold weather also affects District facilities. Although it is an energy saving tactic to reduce the heat in a building over the weekend, be aware of the approaching cold weather and leave the heat on. The Fund knows how much damage can be caused by frozen water lines that snake through unheated attics, burst, and flood IT offices and server rooms down below.

A mixture of sand and rock salt (or “ice melt”) may cause a mess at entrances to your facilities but it also keeps people from slipping and falling on sidewalks, steps, or parking lots. Shovel the snow off these areas before using the sand and salt for the best traction. Keep the area inside the entrance door mopped to reduce slip and fall potential inside as well.

Ice and snow accumulation on tree limbs, metal roofs, and power lines can also be deadly if limbs fall or large sheets of ice fall on people or vehicles below. Be mindful of these hazards when you park or walk under awnings, trees, powerlines, or roof edges.

Slow down and consider the potential consequences of being out in snow and ice and act accordingly. Make good decisions about requiring staff and clients to be out on dangerous roads with all those other drivers who infrequently experience hazardous winter driving conditions. In most cases, the snow and ice may be gone by afternoon or the next day. Wait a few hours and the roads may be safe again.