



## **Winter Driving and Other Considerations**

Winter often hits large parts of Texas much harder than most people expect. The winters of 2021 and 2022 both had significant winter events that had a devastating impact in some members with long lasting temperatures below freezing, heavy snow, ice storms, power outages, and very hazardous driving conditions.

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 or Authority 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 and Authorities should curtail routine maintenance, ongoing construction projects, and management travel to conferences or meetings until roads improve. If conditions are bad enough, close offices and facilities that do not have to have continuous staffing. In most cases, ice and snow may be gone by the afternoon or the next day. Wait a few hours for safer roads.

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 like sandbags 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 go 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 ragged don't do a very good job of keeping windshields clean, so replace them if necessary. Start the vehicle before you need it to allow it to warm up and thaw accumulated ice or snow on the windshield and side glass where you need to be able to see the rearview mirrors. Clean off or scrape the rear windshield for the same reason. 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 and Authority 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 burst and flood district facilities. The so called "Snowmageddon" in 2021 proved a very costly event for the Fund and many Districts and Authorities as pipes burst during the freeze or started gushing when the ice thawed. The cold weather also curtailed power to vital water supply and treatment facilities. Emergency generator response was crucial in some cases and so was additional fuel supply for them. District and Authority vehicles that respond to emergencies should be kept full or topped off before the onset of severe winter weather.

A mixture of sand and rock salt (or “ice melt”) may cause a mess at entrances, walkways, parking lots, or stairways to your facilities but it also helps prevent people from slipping and falling on accumulated ice and snow. Shovel the snow off these areas before using the sand and salt for the best traction. Keep the area inside main entry doors mopped to reduce potential slips and falls inside as well. Always put a wet floor sign out any time you mop to ensure people are aware of the potential hazard.

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. The ice storm in 2022 caused a lot of damage to roofs from falling branches and contributed to freeze damage from power outages. Be mindful of these hazards when you park or walk under awnings, trees, powerlines, or roof edges.



There’s not much we can do to control winter situations that impact the District or Authority. Do what you can by keeping the heat on, refraining from driving, and helping to prevent falls on ice and snow. Slow down and consider the potential consequences of being out in snow and ice and act accordingly. Make good decisions about requiring staff and work crews to be out on dangerous roads with all those other drivers who infrequently experience hazardous winter driving conditions.