

---

## Preparing for Winter Driving Conditions

by Shelley Chayeski  
December 2016

Driving on dry roads is as welcoming as a beautiful fall day. Leaves add a touch of colour to the landscape. Temperatures fall somewhere between the need for air conditioners and bunk heaters. Road surfaces are clear and dry. All seems right with the world.

It's enough to make an experienced fleet manager cringe.

They know these surroundings are simply the warning signs of an approaching winter. In a matter of weeks, or even days, the once-clear surfaces will be coated in snow or ice, doubling or even tripling usual stopping distances.

The early days of the winter driving season can be the most treacherous of all because many drivers are poorly prepared. A trip that begins during a clear fall day may quickly take a turn for the worse as the truck heads into higher elevations or the path of an oncoming storm.

This is the time to prepare drivers and equipment alike.

Valuable seasonal supplies include jugs of de-icing washer fluid and a shovel. This is also the time of year to test bunk heaters, change wiper blades, and test batteries to ensure that everything is ready to roll when temperatures begin to plunge. In the coldest climates, it may even be time to switch engine oils to a formula that will flow more easily.

But some of the required supplies are specifically for drivers, such as seasonal coats and boots. Having extra waterproof gloves are always a good idea to ensure that hands will be protected.

They aren't the only things that will make a big difference if someone is stranded because of a collision or closed highway. It's a good idea to stock enough food, water and coffee in a truck to last at least 12 hours. And regularly topped-up fuel tanks will ensure that bunk heaters still generate warm air while the truck is waiting for a tow.

As valuable as the supplies will be, some additional training may be the most important resource of all, particularly when it comes to newer hires. Recently licensed drivers may have never worked in winter conditions and





---

have no idea what to expect. The same person who was uncomfortable traveling through the mountains earlier this summer will likely need some extra coaching before winter arrives. Even experienced drivers can be caught by surprise with the changing conditions. If you're traveling to areas where chains are required, keep in mind that tire chains will only be helpful if drivers attach them properly and drop road speeds to 35 km/h in deep snow. Booster cables need to be properly connected. Fleets that stock trucks with airline antifreeze or ether will need to carefully instruct employees on how the substances should be used. Are drivers aware that air tanks need to be regularly drained, and air dryers properly maintained, to keep brakes from freezing?

The rules of defensive driving certainly apply, but there are clearly winter-specific techniques to learn, such as easing off the brakes if a trailer begins to jackknife. Circle checks need to include extra time to clear accumulating snow from mud flaps, reflective markings and lights. Trailers with LED lamps will have to be cleared more often than their older counterparts as well, since the bulbs don't generate the heat that radiates from incandescent versions.

Fellow drivers often provide much of the guidance. Newly hired drivers certainly benefit from the coaching of formal mentors. Dispatchers may also be able to schedule trips so trucks can travel together, and to ensure help is always nearby. It isn't the only way dispatchers make a difference. Those who schedule loads can always keep a closer eye on weather reports for any traveled routes. Drivers are responsible for monitoring the updates and conditions along the way, but when they are on the road they are not surfing the internet. Reports from fellow drivers, meanwhile, can be shared over CB's and satellite systems alike.

The safest trips, after all, involve knowing about potential dangers that are on the way.

**This month's expert:**

This month's expert is Shelley Chayeski, Risk Services Specialist. Shelley has served the transportation industry for over 20 years in OS&D, claims, inside sales, operations, and as a manager for driver retention, driver services, and safety.

Northbridge Insurance® is a leading Canadian commercial insurer. Working with our broker partners, we focus on understanding the needs of our customers and on creating solutions that make a difference to their success. You can visit us at [www.nbins.com](http://www.nbins.com).