

Low-visibility conditions require extra measures

Driving at night is more difficult because of reduced visibility. However, low visibility conditions often occur during the day, caused by heavy rain, thick fog, snowfall, dust or smoke. Often in the Pacific Northwest, visibility is reduced to less than one-quarter mile and a dense fog advisory is issued. During these times and in other low visibility conditions, follow these safety tips:

- Slow down and don't use cruise control.
- Keep your headlights clean and your windshield clear.
- Increase following distance.
- Eliminate distractions so you can focus on the road.
- In fog or during snowfall, use your low beams. High beam lights could reflect back, making visibility worse for you and other drivers.
- In fog, use your foglights — but remember, Oregon law says you must turn them off when within 500 feet of an oncoming vehicle and within 350 feet when following another vehicle.
- Avoid entering an area if you cannot see a safe distance ahead.

• If you suddenly encounter a severe loss of visibility, pull off the pavement as far as possible. Stop, turn off your lights, set the emergency brake and take your foot off the brake to be sure the taillights are not illuminated. Turn on your emergency flashers.

• In dense fog or blinding snow conditions, if you can't pull off the roadway, slow down, turn on your low beam headlights and sound the horn occasionally. Use the white fog line or roadside reflectors if necessary to help guide you and don't change lanes or attempt to pass.

- Never stop in the travel lanes.

"Too fast" is too risky!

One of the most common driver errors contributing to crashes is "driving too fast for conditions." Weather conditions do impact travel safely, so slow down and be ready to



make other adjustments as road conditions change.

Be seen - use headlights at all hours in winter!

Turning on your low-beam headlights during the daytime in the winter months can help make your vehicle more visible to other drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Driving with your lights on during the day throughout the winter helps contrast your vehicle against buildings and other terrain features. Diminished visibility results when there is little contrast between the color of a vehicle and its background, such as a lightly colored car against snow or a green car against foliage. Small cars are harder to see at a distance compared to pickups and SUVs. Headlights also contribute to safety on highways with one lane of travel in each direction.

Improved visibility can help prevent crashes such as head-on collisions and side-swipes, as well as collisions with pedestrians and cyclists. Tests conducted by the Society of Automotive Engineers determined that with headlights off, drivers can see oncoming cars when they are an average of 2,074 feet away. With headlights on, that distance more than doubles to an average of 4,720 feet.

Also, remember to keep your car headlights clean. Get in the habit of wiping off your lights at the gas station; that way you're ready for low-visibility conditions.

Summer chip seals mean adjustments for winter plowing

Motorists traveling on part of OR 7, OR 410, U.S. 26 and U.S. 395 in Baker and Grant counties this winter may notice extra snow left on these routes after it is plowed by Oregon Department of Transportation maintenance crews. This is because scraping the road surface with our plows could damage areas that were chip sealed this summer. On newly chipped seal highways, we use special metal plates called shoes that keep the plow blades about an inch off the road surface. You will need to slow down and pay extra attention in and near these highway sections when snow or ice is present:

- OR 7 Whitney Highway – Grant Co. line to Mason Dam, milepost 9.5-35.5.
- OR 410 Sumpter Highway – Junction OR 7 to Sumpter, milepost 0-3.7.
- U.S. 26 John Day Highway – John Day to Prairie City, milepost 162.6-175.
- U.S. 395-C John Day-Burns Highway – Starr Ridge to Harney Co. line, milepost 15.5-40.3.
- U.S. 395-C John Day-Burns Highway – John Day to Canyon City, milepost .03C-2.3C.

"We recognize the importance of winter plowing operations, but also recognize

the importance of protecting a significant infrastructure investment that will have a long term benefits," said Transportation Maintenance Manager Shane Giffin.

Chip seals consist of rock chips pressed into a layer of oil and water mixed together, called an emulsion. Chip seals are a cost-effective way to protect and extend the life of the road surface. Because it can take several months for the water to evaporate and the oil to harden, the surface is prone to damage by plow blades during the first winter after the chip rock has been applied. We won't be plowing all the way to the pavement on these sections, but will use sanding rock and deicer to help improve traction per ODOT's maintenance Level of Service procedures. (See ODOT Level of Service information in this publication for more information.)

Most highways will be plowed as close to the road surface as possible and we'll resume this practice on the recently chip sealed routes next season.

"Please be patient with your fellow motorists and our crews who are working day and night this winter to help keep you safe," Giffin said. "And always adjust your driving to the conditions of the road."