

Wintery roadway conditions call for special attention when driving

Adapted from information provided by the ODOT Region One office and the Columbia County Road Department.

As drivers we all need to understand how road conditions can differ depending upon variables such as temperature, moisture, time of day, traffic, and even how roads are kept ice-free.

Black ice, also called glare ice or clear ice, is a thin layer of ice on the roadway. Any ice is dangerous to drive on, but black ice is worse because the road looks wet, not icy. Black ice isn't really black, but it's so thin and transparent that the darker pavement shows through. It often has a matte appearance rather than the ex-

pected gloss.

Black ice is most common at night and very early in the morning, when temperatures are lowest and traffic lightest. It is usually thin enough that it melts soon after sunlight hits it, but it can last much longer on shaded areas of roadways. Bridges and overpasses are danger spots because they don't receive heat from the ground and lose heat to the air, so they can drop below freezing even when the rest of the roadway doesn't.

In Columbia County, roads are often in shade, covered with run-off from slopes, or in bright sun. It is not uncommon for a driver to encounter dry conditions, extreme glare, and black ice within just a few sec-

onds. As drivers, we need to be extremely alert and anticipate such extreme changes. Drivers also need to be aware that they are likely to encounter various methods for handling icy roads.

Highways 30, 202 and 47 are State roads maintained by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). A few years ago, ODOT began using magnesium chloride as a de-icer on Highway 30 at locations such as hills in Rainier and Clatskanie. This test project was so successful that it has expanded to all three state roads in the county. We have gotten used to the roads being sprayed to keep the highway from freezing, but we need to remember that rain dilutes the de-icer, which needs to be re-applied. This de-icing method is expensive, but it saves lives.

Roads maintained by the Co-

lumbia County Road Department do not use de-icer, for two reasons. It is expensive and the county does not have the equipment to apply the product. So county roads are sanded. Sanding doesn't melt the ice but provides traction on ice. It also kicks off to the sides of the roads after a period of time and must be swept up. Roads in municipalities are the responsibility of each city. Side streets and roads are not usually sanded.

During normal working hours, if crews notice the roads becoming icy, they start sanding. After hours, if a storm is anticipated, supervisors prepare for it and watch the roads for sanding as needed. After regular hours, the Road Department is notified by C-Com based on 9-1-1 calls. During normal business hours, the public can call the Road Department in St. He-

lens, 503-397-5090, or Vernonia, 503-429-5883. After hours and weekends, call 9-1-1. The public often is the eyes and ears for the conditions.

Drivers play an important role in winter driving safety and need to be aware of the conditions around you. Driving at the speed you normally use can be deadly in icy weather.

Ice forms on the road when the temperature on the road surface drops below freezing. The road cools more slowly than the air and warms up more slowly as well, so even if the air temperature is above freezing, the roadway may still be frozen. This discrepancy between temperatures can lull drivers into a false sense of security.

Watch the external thermometer if your vehicle is equipped with one and, when it reaches 34 degrees, be extra careful. With or without a thermometer, be careful driving up hill because the temperature is usually lower as you gain altitude.

Also be careful when driving into some low areas, such as the Chapman area on Scappoose Vernonia Road. These areas are known as cold air sinks because cold air is heavier than warm air and may settle in low areas.

Ice prevents tires from gripping the road so steering is difficult and stopping is harder. A four-wheel drive vehicle won't help much. Snow tires are designed for snow, not ice. Stud-tires can be helpful; chains are even more helpful. But even with chains, stopping distance is still several times greater than on dry pavement with ordinary tires.

Here are some tip to help avoid slipping on icy bridges and roads:

- Keep your distance from vehicles in front of you. Allow about three car lengths.
- Turn off cruise control, be alert and drive cautiously.
- Look for ice other than on the roadway – on windshield wipers, side view mirrors, road signs, trees or fences. If ice has formed on any of these, it may be on the road
- If your vehicle feels like it's floating, gradually slow down; don't slam on your brakes or you may skid out of control

Above all, slow down. Your life and the lives of others depend on how you respond to winter driving conditions.

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Feral cat spay/neuter clinic soon

By Stefanie Gunderson, Feral Cat Coalition volunteer

The St. Helens Animal Control, Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon (FCCO), and community volunteers announce the hosting of the ninth annual spay and neuter clinic for feral cats. The clinic will be held on Sunday, February 4, in St. Helens. It is for one day only and reservations are required. This is a multi-community event with volunteers and cats coming from Clatskanie, Rainier, Scappoose, St. Helens, Vernonia, and Warren.

To make your reservation,

call Laura Snyder at St. Helens Animal Control, 503-397-3333. This clinic treats only feral, stray, or barn cats that have dedicated caregivers who care and feed them regularly.

If you are in need of financial assistance to spay or neuter your cat, there are low-cost clinics available. For more information contact your veterinarian, local humane societies, or call the Oregon Spay and Neuter Fund at 503-286-2411.

Information may also be found on the following websites: www.feralcats.com or www.alleycat.org.

Pet of the Month

Columbia Humane Society in St. Helens has a variety of wonderful pets available for adoption. Find the pet that's right for you in the shelter at 2084 Oregon St. Monday through Saturday, 11 am. to 5 pm. 503-397-4353



Morris is a very affectionate large orange tabby with beautiful blue eyes. He is neutered and current on all his shots.

The Columbia Humane Society is a No-Kill non-profit shelter dedicated to helping friends find each other since 1985.

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