

Winter Driving

What Employers Need to Know



Understand the Risks

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of workplace deaths in British Columbia. Winter conditions – such as freezing temperatures, rain, snow, black ice and reduced daylight hours – can present serious hazards for occupational drivers, whether they drive a vehicle full time, or just as part of their job.

Every employer in B.C. must ensure the health and safety of all workers in their “workplace on wheels.” As an employer, it is your responsibility to establish and maintain an effective safety program that addresses the risks and hazards your workers and contractors face when driving either a company or personal vehicle for work purposes.

If your organization operates company vehicles – or directs workers to use their personal vehicle for work purposes – the following information will help you reduce the risks associated with the winter driving season (October 1 to March 31).

(Please note: the information on this tip sheet is primarily designed for fleets that operate passenger cars or light-duty trucks. If your organization operates commercial vehicles with a GVW in excess of 5000 kg, please consult other information sources at ShiftIntoWinter.ca.)

Understand Your Legal Responsibilities

- You are legally responsible for the safety of your workers. Know your responsibilities as an employer under the *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*. (Visit BCLaws.ca and WorkSafeBC.com for more information.)
- As an employer, you must meet the standard and tests of “due diligence.” (You must take all reasonable care to protect the well-being of employees.)
- Remedy unsafe conditions and take action when someone informs you about a hazardous situation.

- Support the safety activities of supervisors, drivers and your organization’s safety representative or safety committee.
- Ensure that your drivers have the safety training they need.
- Know and understand the requirements of the *B.C. Motor Vehicle Act* and associated regulations.
- Ensure that your managers, supervisors, workers and contractors understand their responsibilities under your company’s safe driving policy, the *Motor Vehicle Act*, the *Motor Vehicle Act Regulations*, the *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*. If your workers operate vehicles outside of B.C., make sure they follow the applicable laws and regulations in those jurisdictions.
- Establish or strengthen safety and work-related driving policies and maintain an effective, up-to-date health and safety program. Consult the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation* for program requirements.

The following information sets out steps and actions you can take to help meet your legal obligations and improve safety for workers who drive during the winter.

Assess the Risks, Identify Hazards, Develop Strategies

- Perform a yearly safety review to identify driver, trip, vehicle and environmental risk factors.
- Identify hazards – such as seasonal weather conditions, vehicle condition and road hazards – and develop policies and procedures to keep your drivers safe. Seek input from your drivers.
- Depending on the size of your business, develop a written strategy and/or an action plan to eliminate or reduce driving risks.
- For more information on risks, hazards and strategies, visit RoadSafetyAtWork.ca.

Determine When Work Driving is Necessary

- Where possible, eliminate the hazards associated with winter driving by first exhausting all other means of conducting business (e.g., by e-mail, telephone, video conferencing, making use of public transportation etc.). By limiting vehicle trips, you will keep your work force safe, reduce costs and improve the environment.

When Driving is Necessary

- Safe trips are *planned* trips. When driving is required:
 - Prepare your drivers.
 - Prepare your fleet and *grey fleet* vehicles (personal cars driven for work purposes).
 - Ensure that your workers drive for the conditions.

Prepare Your Drivers

- Assess the driving competency of your workers.
- Provide your supervisors and workers with information to help them understand the importance of safe seasonal driving. (Visit **ShiftIntoWinter.ca** for more information.)
- Instruct supervisors and employees to check current weather and road conditions before driving, at **DriveBC.ca** or other sites.
- Encourage your supervisors and workers to revise work travel schedules during hazardous conditions.
- Provide external winter driving training to your workers. Ninety percent of vehicle crashes are caused by human error.
- Instruct workers to conduct a vehicle pre-trip inspection each time they drive.
- Develop and manage a working-alone procedure for your workers.
- Develop procedures that instruct workers what to do if they are stranded. Include specific directions (e.g., stay with the vehicle for safety and warmth; carry a cell phone to call for roadside assistance or 911 in an emergency.)
- Consider the use of a signed “driver’s pledge” as evidence of your commitment and workers’ commitment to driving safety.
- Encourage discussion of road safety issues, such as winter driving, at safety meetings. Conduct quick safety “tool-box talks” at the start of each shift.



Prepare Your Fleet

- Consider the purchase of vehicles with better crash safety ratings. See <http://www.icbc.com/road-safety/safer-vehicles> for more information.
- Give each vehicle a pre-winter check-up. Make sure tires, battery, brakes, cooling and heating systems, electrical and exhaust systems and belts and hoses are in good working order. Switch to winter wiper blades.
- Instruct workers to scrape all snow and ice from windows, lights, mirrors and vehicle surfaces before driving. Consider providing an ice scraper with a long-handle to reduce the reach. In addition, windows should be completely defrosted before driving.
- Instruct workers to check tire pressure regularly. Tire pressure drops in colder conditions.
- Ensure vehicles are equipped with winter tires. They provide better traction in cold weather (7°C or less) and in snow, slush, and icy conditions. Install four matched tires that carry the winter tire logo on each fleet vehicle. Encourage and support the installation of winter tires on your “grey fleet” (personal cars and trucks driven for work purposes) vehicles.
- If tire chains are to be used, ensure that drivers are trained on how to safely install them. In addition, develop procedures on ideal locations (away from busy roads) where workers can safely chain up.
- Instruct workers to keep gas tanks full to avoid condensation which can cause fuel lines to freeze.
- Provide each vehicle a winter survival kit that includes an appropriate first aid kit, an approved vest, additional windshield washer fluid, flares, matches or a lighter, shovel, traction mat, sandbags (for extra weight and traction), flashlight and extra alkaline batteries, battery jumper cables, spare tire, wheel wrench and a jack.



Direct Workers to Drive for the Conditions

- Allow extra time for work travel. Encourage workers to adjust their schedules so they aren't rushing to get to their destination.
- Instruct your workers to slow down. Posted speed limits are for ideal road conditions; drivers must reduce speed depending on the conditions.
- Instruct your workers to increase the distance between their vehicle and the vehicle driving in front of them.
- Inform workers to use caution when approaching highway maintenance equipment.
- Instruct your drivers to be aware of challenges such as limited visibility (especially in adverse weather conditions), pedestrians and cyclists wearing dark clothing. Winter driving can also be a challenge for older fleet drivers as their vision takes longer to adapt to changing light conditions.
- Instruct your workers about the hazards of seasonal rain and fog:
 - Light rain mixed with residual oil can make road conditions slick.
 - Heavy rain creates conditions ideal for hydroplaning.
 - Fog can reduce visibility of the road ahead to as little as the front of the vehicle. Driving in fog should be avoided whenever possible.
- Instruct your workers about the hazards of snow and ice:
 - Hard-packed snow on a road can be as slippery as ice. Snow can also be rutted and full of hard tracks and snow "gullies" that can throw the vehicle off track.
 - Wet snow can make for slushy roads. Heavy slush can build up in the wheel wells of a vehicle and can affect steering.
 - Slush and spray from other vehicles can cause sudden loss of visibility.
 - Ice forms on roads in shaded areas, on bridges and overpasses – these sections of road often freeze much sooner and stay frozen long after the sun has risen.
 - Sections of the road that appear black and shiny have frosted over and can cause a vehicle to suddenly lose traction.

Administration

- Monitor the performance of your winter driving program and policies. (Documentation is an essential element of an effective road safety and health and safety program.)
- Conduct seasonal maintenance reviews and vehicle checks in the fall and spring. Include personal vehicles used for work-related driving. Review vehicle maintenance procedures and information at health and safety meetings.
- Communicate disciplinary measures for not complying with the organization's driving policy.

Leadership is Key

- Show your commitment to occupational road safety and workplace safety; your support sets the tone for positive work practices adopted by your supervisors and drivers.
- Communicate your commitment to safety to the entire organization; employees need to see that senior management is committed to road safety.
- Support your managers and supervisors – assist them to make safe decisions about when workers should travel during winter.
- Reward or acknowledge safe actions taken by your supervisors and drivers.
- Encourage input on driving safety from supervisors and workers. Discuss "near miss" motor vehicle incidents.
- Lead by example – drive safely, at work and at leisure. Support and follow the rules set out in your company's safety program.

Additional Resources

- ShiftIntoWinter.ca
- DriveBC.ca
- WorkSafeBC.com
- RoadSafetyAtWork.ca
- ICBC.com

Know before you go.