

Winter Driving

What Supervisors Need to Know



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 as part of their job.

As a supervisor (or owner, superintendent, lead hand, foreman, department head, journeymen, trainer etc.) you have a responsibility to ensure the safety of your workers, including those who drive company or personal vehicles for business purposes. The following information will help you and your workers understand and 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

- Know your responsibilities under the *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*. (Visit WorkSafeBC.com and BCLaws.ca for more information. For more information on improving your supervisory skills and meeting your workplace safety obligations, visit SupervisingForSafety.com)
- Instruct drivers and other workers on safe work procedures; verify that tasks are performed safely and provide training when needed.
- Make sure only authorized personnel operate equipment.

- Ensure that young workers and workers new to your organization receive comprehensive safety training. Since these workers are at higher risk for injuries, supervise them closely.
- Ensure that workers and contractors understand their responsibilities under your organization's safe driving policy, the *Motor Vehicle Act*, the *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*. If your workers operate vehicles outside of B.C., make sure that they follow the applicable laws and regulations in those jurisdictions.
- Positively reinforce safe work performance.

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 an annual safety review to identify hazards, such as seasonal weather conditions, vehicle condition and road hazards. Make use of information sources such as safety committee minutes, maintenance records and anecdotal information from your workers.
- Depending on the size of your business, develop and implement a written strategy and/or an action plan to eliminate or reduce driving risks.
- Use your action plan or business case to get management support for road safety. 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 workers 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

- Provide your workers with information to help them understand the importance of safe seasonal driving. (Visit ShiftIntoWinter.ca for more information.)
- Instruct your workers to check current weather and road conditions before driving at DriveBC.ca or other sites.
- Encourage your workers to revise work travel schedules during hazardous conditions.
- Provide 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. Monitor pre-trip documentation.
- Direct workers to follow your organization's working-alone procedure. Monitor compliance with this regulatory requirement.
- Instruct workers on 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.)
- 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

- 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, and mirrors, as well as from the hood and roof. 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 vehicles.
- If tire chains are to be used, ensure that workers are trained on how to safely install them. In addition, develop procedures on ideal locations where workers can safely chain up (i.e., away from busy roads).
- Instruct workers to keep gas tanks full to avoid condensation which can cause fuel lines to freeze.
- Provide each fleet and grey fleet vehicle with a winter survival kit that includes an appropriate first aid kit, an approved high visibility 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 workers to slow down when driving. Posted speed limits are for ideal road conditions; drivers must reduce speed depending on the conditions.
- Instruct 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 or 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 vehicles 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

- Keep records of your safety activities. (Documentation is an essential element of any effective road safety or 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 helps to set the tone for positive work practices being adopted by your workers.
- Support your workers – assist them in making safe decisions about when not to travel during winter.
- Reward or acknowledge safe actions taken by your workers.
- Encourage input on driving safety from your workers. Discuss "near miss" motor-vehicle incidents and other driving hazards.
- 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
- SupervisingForSafety.com
- RoadSafetyAtWork.ca
- ICBC.com

Know before you go.