

# Surviving Black Ice

It's a typical mid-January Monday morning. The weekend ended too soon and the long grind of the work week looms ahead. You start your normal morning routine — making coffee, eating breakfast, taking a shower, dressing and warming up the car. The sun still hasn't peeked over the distant horizon, and the temperature dropped well below freezing last night. Looks like a good time to try out that new winter jacket you got for Christmas.

Thankfully, the winter has been rather mild this year and you haven't had to deal with the hassle of constant snowfall. You're beginning to run late, so you back out of the driveway before your car fully heats up and head down familiar roads to work. Even with the new coat on, the inside of the car is still frigid. You're fumbling with the heater knob when your car suddenly begins skidding and goes into a spin. You've just driven across one of the most perilous and often unseen hazards on winter roads — black ice.

Black ice can be a serious driving hazard when the temperature dips near or below freezing. Black ice forms when snow, water or other types of condensation melt onto the road surface and refreeze. It's called black ice because it is difficult to see and can blend in with the road's color. It is most common on bridges, overpasses and in shaded sections of the road where it can remain frozen after other parts of the road have thawed.

You need to follow certain precautions when driving in winter weather or when there is the potential for black ice to form on the roads. The first precaution is to always wear your seat belt — something you should be doing anyway. Then, as you drive, watch out for black patches or what appears to be water on the road, as this could be black ice. Just as when driving in the rain, avoid using your cruise control or overdrive because these can cause wheel spin and send your car out of control. Allow a generous following distance behind the vehicle ahead so you'll have ample room to stop or maneuver if you hit ice or need to react quickly. Accelerate slowly to maintain traction and never slam on the brakes, which can cause a skid. If you notice a possible trouble spot ahead, shift into a lower gear to reduce your speed and give you more control of your vehicle.

Should these precautions fail and you find yourself beginning to skid, here are a few driving techniques to help you regain control. If you feel your vehicle beginning to skid, quickly take your foot off the gas, as accelerating only increases your chances of spinning. Also, don't slam on the brakes. Hitting your brakes will send you skidding out of control. If you have a stick shift, push in the clutch or put the transmission in neutral and allow the vehicle's momentum to carry you straight across the ice. In the event that the car begins to skid, turn the steering wheel in the direction of the skid to get the vehicle back on track.

Using these techniques can mean the difference between driving out of a skid and spinning out of control. While winter driving has its risks, being prepared and alert can keep you on the road and

## Driving Safely on Icy Roads

Here are some additional winter driving tips to help keep you safe.

- Turn on your lights to increase your visibility to other motorists.
- Make sure your tread is in good condition.
- Keep your headlights and windshield clean.
- Use low gears to keep traction, especially on hills.
- Don't pass snowplows and sanding trucks. These drivers have limited visibility, and you'll likely find the road in front of them worse than the road behind.
- Don't assume your vehicle can handle all conditions. Even four-wheel and front-wheel-drive vehicles can encounter trouble on winter roads.