

# WSDOT Winter Operations

WSDOT maintenance crews work to keep highways safe and traffic moving. When temperatures dip near freezing, we treat state highways with deicing chemicals and/or sand. We use anti-corrosion agents in all of our chemicals, but you should still wash your vehicle frequently to help protect brakes, alloy wheels, and wiring.

Drivers should prepare for winter driving. Install traction tires and carry chains because no one can guarantee the roads will be clear of ice and snow.

## Before You Leave Home

Prepare your car for winter – get it tuned up for winter driving. Check the battery, lights, antifreeze, heater/defrost, belts, hoses, filters, oil, wipers and brakes. When planning a trip, allow yourself extra time.

## What to Carry on Winter Trips

### Basic Winter Safety Gear

- Ice scraper, snow brush, small shovel, tow chain, jumper cables.

### Break-Down Kit

- Blanket, gloves, boots, warm clothes, flashlight, food, water, first aid kit, extra batteries, road flares, emergency cash.

### Chains

- If the traction advisory requires chains, two-wheel drive passenger vehicles must install chains. If WSDOT posts a chain advisory, law enforcement will require drivers without chains to turn around. Violators may be issued a citation. Remember, in extreme weather conditions, the chain requirement may include four- and all-wheel drive vehicles.
- Vehicles over 10,000 gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR), including some larger passenger trucks, SUVs, RVs, and vehicles towing trailers, must carry chains November 1 through March 31.

## Questions for Your Tire Dealer

Talk to your local tire dealer and find out if your tires meet Washington's traction tire requirements. Your tire dealer can help you select the best option for your travel. Plan ahead and remember tire dealers are busiest before and during winter storms.

Tires and tire chains fit different cars differently. If you have any questions about what tires are best for your car, ask your local tire dealer. Here are some to get you started:

- Are my tires traction tires?
- Which chains fit my tires best?
- Can I keep my winter tires on year-round?

## Studded Tire Regulations in Washington

Washington allows the use of studded tires from November 1 through March 31. You can find more information at [www.wsdot.wa.gov/winter](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/winter).

Please remember, winter weather can extend past March, especially in the higher elevations. WSDOT must evaluate weather across the state when considering any studded tire extension, and the higher-elevation highways are only a small part of the overall highway system. We advise drivers who plan to travel into higher elevations after March 31 to remove studded tires and have alternative traction devices.

When chains are required, studded tires alone will not meet the chain requirement unless your vehicle is a four- or all-wheel drive vehicle. Those traveling into higher elevations should carry chains and have approved traction tires year-round. Talk to your tire dealer about the traction tire that will work for you.

**Driver error often stops traffic. Drivers who are not prepared for winter conditions, or drive too fast, can cause collisions and delay travel for everybody.**

**These drivers could be held responsible for vehicle damage, roadway damage, towing bills, and traffic tickets. This debt can easily reach into the thousands of dollars, and that estimate does not include the cost of injuries.**



**For more winter driving information, visit [www.wsdot.wa.gov/winter](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/winter)**

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Information:** Materials can be provided in alternative formats: large print, Braille, cassette tape, or on computer disk for people with disabilities by calling the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) at (360) 705-7097. Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing may contact OEO through the Washington Relay Service at 7-1-1.

**Title VI Statement to Public:** It is the Washington State Department of Transportation's (WSDOT) policy to assure that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin and sex, as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise discriminated against under any of its federally funded programs and activities. Any person who believes his/her Title VI protection has been violated, may file a complaint with WSDOT's Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO). For Title VI complaint forms and advice, please contact OEO's Title VI Coordinator at (360) 705-7098.

Cut on the dotted line and keep this half at home.

Cut on the dotted line and take this half on the road.

# Your Guide to Winter Driving

**What should I have in the car?**

**What kind of tires do I need?**

**When can I expect avalanche control operations, and why?**

**How do I get through winter with my car and my driving record intact?**

**Find answers and more inside . . .**



**Washington State  
Department of Transportation**

## WSDOT Traction Advisories

- **Traction Tires Advised** - Oversize loads prohibited. Oversize vehicles are restricted from roadways during severe weather conditions.
- **Traction Tires Required** - Passenger vehicles must have approved traction tires. Chains are required on all vehicles over 10,000 gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR), including large passenger trucks and SUVs over 10,000 GVWR.
- **Tire Chains Required (except four- and all-wheel drive)** - In extreme weather conditions, the advisory may indicate chains are required on four- and all-wheel drive vehicles.

## Reasons for Mountain Pass Closures and Delay

It takes only one unprepared driver to stop or slow traffic. Be prepared for winter travel, be extra cautious and slow down.

- **Collision Clean Up:** Drivers who go too fast for conditions, or are not prepared for winter travel end up in the ditch, or blocking other drivers. One of the most common reasons we close the pass is to get these spun-out or blocking cars off the road so others can safely travel over the mountains.
- **Avalanche Control:** When possible, we do avalanche control work when traffic volumes are low. If there are heavy snowfalls or extreme temperature changes, we may have to do emergency avalanche control work. We attempt to provide advance notice, but in an emergency, this may not be possible.
- **Road Clearing:** If we have heavy snow in a short amount of time, we may close the pass to clear ice and snow from travel lanes.

## On the Road

- Do not be the driver who shuts down the pass! Drive for conditions - slower speeds, slower acceleration, slower steering, and slower braking in winter conditions.
- Use your headlights at all times.
- Remember, four- and all-wheel drive vehicles will not stop or steer better in icy conditions.
- Don't use cruise control or overdrive on slick or snow-covered surfaces.
- Leave extra room between your vehicle and the vehicles in front of you. Look farther ahead in traffic. And remember, big trucks take longer to stop.
- Slow down when approaching intersections, off-ramps, bridges, or shady spots.
- If you find yourself behind a snowplow, stay behind it until it is safe to pass. Remember that a snowplow driver's field of vision is very limited, so he or she may not see you. Snow removal equipment travels slowly and may make sudden movements right or left. Stay well back (15 car lengths) until you're sure it is safe to pass or until the plow pulls off the road.
- Slow down and be extra cautious near the chain-up and removal areas. There are often people out of their vehicles moving around.

## Check Your Route



Cut on the dotted line and take this half on the road.

## Know Before You Go

Check the WSDOT web site before you leave.

- **Winter Information:** [www.wsdot.wa.gov/winter](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/winter)
  - **WSDOT Newsroom:** [www.wsdot.wa.gov/news/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/news/). In the newsroom, you can sign up for e-mail or text news alerts and the WSDOT Twitter account.
  - **Highway Cameras:** [www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/)
  - **Traffic Alerts and Slowdowns:** [www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/trafficalerts](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/trafficalerts)
  - **Mountain Pass Reports:** [www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/passess](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/passess)
  - **Weather:** [www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/weather](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/weather)
  - **Road Temperatures:** [www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/roadtemps/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/traffic/roadtemps/)
  - **Commercial Vehicle Services:** [www.wsdot.wa.gov/commercialvehicle/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/commercialvehicle/)
  - **Washington State Patrol:** [www.wsp.wa.gov](http://www.wsp.wa.gov)
  - **On Your Mobile Device:** [www.wsdot.wa.gov/small/](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/small/)
- On the Phone:**  
Call 5-1-1 for travel info and mountain pass conditions.
- On the Radio:**  
Program your radio to WSDOT's Highway Advisory Radio frequencies before you leave: 530 AM and 1610 AM.



**Keeping the road safe for wintertime travelers is our top priority. We perform avalanche control to prevent natural avalanches, stopping traffic until we clear the snow from travel lanes. We do this at night whenever possible, but sometimes we have to do this during the day, and with short notice.**



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