

Make time for winter

The Highways Agency cannot stop it snowing or the thermometer from falling, but it is as ready as it can be for winter. And it is asking road users to play their part by taking responsibility for their own driving and journeys – by planning their travel and being prepared for severe weather

The Agency has the vital job of keeping England's motorways and major A-roads open during severe weather, and ensuring that road users can travel safely to their destinations. Its fleet of winter vehicles use the latest technology and techniques to treat roads and clear snow – using less salt than in the past, which makes the fleet more effective and helps the environment.

The winter fleet rehearses its severe weather procedures well before the winter period, which runs from 1 October until 31 March. The Agency's new weather information service, which has already improved its response to snow and ice, also includes severe rainfall and flooding, which can cause more prolonged and infrastructural problems.

But no matter how prepared it is, the Agency cannot prevent snow from falling. So it asks road users to drive and act responsibly and to think about the journeys that they make, by planning their route, adjusting their plans according to traffic and weather conditions, servicing their vehicles regularly and carrying an emergency kit.

Preparation is key

Drivers should be prepared to drive according to the road conditions, taking extra care and following instructions and speed restrictions on variable message signs. Salt is very effective, but even where roads have been treated there is still the risk of ice, especially where there are gradients in the road, bends or overhanging trees.

During severe weather conditions the Agency will be working closely with the emergency services to clear incidents and to provide drivers with information about closures and congestion, so that they can make informed decisions about their travel plans.

Tools such as <http://www.highways.gov.uk/traffic-information/> and <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/> help drivers to plan their journeys, and the Agency's mobile website at m.highways.gov.uk, and iPhone app, give road users the same information on their mobile phones and tablets that they would be able to access at home. This year the Agency will also be making more use of its regional Twitter feeds to get information to road users, and customers should expect to see more tailored information and interactivity.



We advise drivers to ACT

- **Air pressure**
Should be correct for the manufacturer's guidelines (TyreSafe has an iPhone air pressure app)
- **Condition**
Tyres should have no bulges or snags
- **Tread**
The legal minimum tread depth is 1.6mm – which can be tested with the edge of a twenty pence piece.



- Ice scraper and de-icer
- Warm clothes and blankets
– for you and all passengers
- Torch and spare batteries
– or a wind-up torch
- Boots
- First aid kit
- Jump leads
- A shovel
- Road atlas
- Sunglasses (the glare off snow can be dazzling).
- Food and a thermos with a hot drink
- Any medication that drivers, or passengers, need to take regularly

Between the beginning of April and the end of June 2013, the Highways Agency had 2010 incidents reported to them where drivers had run out of fuel on motorways – an average of 670 a month. Over the same period there were 3,852 tyre related incidents reported – amounting to an average of 1,284 per month. So the Agency is encouraging drivers to service their vehicles regularly, ensure that they have sufficient fuel for their journey and to carry an emergency kit [see box].

The Agency also supported October's Tyre Safety Month. Run by TyreSafe, a not for profit safety organisation representing tyre manufacturers, wholesalers and fitters, the aim is to make drivers aware of how important it is to check their tyres before travelling, and to show how simple these checks are [see box].

With four hard winters behind it, the Highways Agency has built up a body of knowledge to keep its network running through winter, and this year is looking to drivers to do their bit by preparing themselves and their vehicles and, if it comes to it, asking themselves if their journey really is necessary. ●



A winter service vehicle being loaded with salt