

Open Roads

*RoSPA Advanced Drivers and Riders (RoADAR)
North East Branch Newsletter*

Welcome to Open Roads

Special points of interest:

De-icing your car

Driving on winter roads

This is the “Open Roads” newsletter for RoaDAR North-East members. It’s YOUR newsletter, and we would welcome any input that you may want to suggest. For your newsletter to be a success it needs input from everyone.

Newsflash: mobile phone use

Drivers are to be banned completely from using a mobile phone or similar hand-held device while driving in the UK in an effort to further reduce deaths and injuries on the road.

The new laws will catch up with the way in which the technology has developed over the years which means that such devices are no longer just mobile phones but can do a range of other things.

It is already illegal to text or make a phone call (other than in an emergency) using a hand-held device while driving and the law will now go further to ban drivers from using their phones to take photos or videos, scroll through playlists or play games etc.

This will mean anyone caught using their hand-held device while driving will face a £200 fixed penalty notice and 6 points on their licence.

“Hands-free” use of a phone will still be permitted, provided the phone is secured in a cradle. Drivers must, however, always take responsibility for their driving and can be charged with an offence if the police find them not to be in proper control of their vehicle.

“Words from the Webmaster”

The website has all the latest information on our status—so keep checking it!

If you have suggestions for additional documents you would find useful, or for the website, please pass them on.

John Errington webmaster@roadar-northeast.org.uk

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How to deal with ice on your car windscreen properly

Some people might reach for the kettle or their bank card to de-ice their car. But these methods could lead to a cracked windscreen or even a fine. Don't worry. Some simple precautions could keep your windscreen frost-free. And you won't have to use that half-frozen bank card to pay off a fine.

Why does my windscreen ice up?

As the temperature drops below freezing, water vapour in the air becomes super-cooled. This with condensation causes frost and ice.

But the temperature doesn't have to drop below freezing for your windscreen and windows to freeze over; the glass of your car's windows freezes over much quicker than any other surface of the car.

Prevention is better than cure

If you have an early start on winter mornings why not invest in a windscreen cover; failing that a blanket or even cardboard can keep your windscreen free of ice.

Reduce condensation

First things first - clean your windows inside and out. Moisture tends to cling to particles of dirt, so a grubby window is a haven for condensation. Use a cleaner that's designed for car windows, and polish them with a clean microfibre cloth. Some newspaper might do in a pinch.

Condensation inside the car can lead to the inside of the screen icing up or misting over. Leaving damp and wet things in the car - wet dog towel, boots or a soggy umbrella creates moisture in the air as they dry out. So remember to always take them out when you leave the car.

Opening your windows a little near the end of your journey will help a lot as it lets the moist air out.

Step-by-step de-icing checklist

Check your windscreen wipers. Make sure your wipers aren't switched on - if they're frozen to the windscreen they could be damaged when the engine starts.

Switch on your ignition and crank the heat up. Turn your blowers to full and the temperature to high. Point them at the windscreen - if you have a heated windscreen option, use it. Switch on the A/C if you have it to keep the air dry.

Use a de-icer and ice scraper. It's always handy to keep a can of de-icer for the car nearby. If you've run out, you can make your own DIY de-icer at home. Next go to town on the ice using your scraper. You might need to scrape some ice off the inside of the windscreen, but this can be trickier due to the curved glass.

De-icing techniques to avoid

Don't use boiling water, it could be disastrous. The shock of even warm water on the cold glass could crack your windscreen. And fixing that isn't going to be cheap.

If you switch your engine on to warm your car up, don't leave your car unattended. Having an idling engine on a public road could land you with a £20 fine.

When you're rushing to get away in the morning, it's easy to reach for the nearest sharp object and carve a porthole in the ice. But using anything other than a car ice scraper could scratch your windscreen.

But more serious is the possibility of a £60 fine and three points on your licence. This is the penalty for driving with a limited view of the road. And with points on your licence, you might find that your car insurance costs go up when it comes to renew your policy. So it's best to stay on the right side of the law and get that windscreen completely clear before setting off.

Is de-icer spray bad for your car?

Car de-icer sprays are safe to use on your car. While you should take care to ensure it only goes on glass, it shouldn't damage your car's paintwork.

How to make your own homemade de-icer

You can buy eco-friendly de-icers, but if you want to be even greener, a homemade de-icer might be the best option. Often suggested, salty water could damage the windscreen, wipers or bodywork, as well as collecting around the washer fluid nozzles causing corrosion. A mixture of two parts alcohol or surgical spirit to one part water is effective.

However perhaps the simplest, cheapest, and safest is to fill a spray bottle with a strong (1:3) mix of CONCENTRATED winter screenwash and water, and spray on.

How to drive in snow and ice

Driving in snow and ice causes significant issues for motorists every year. Motorists might need to be even more cautious this year due to a possible shortage of gritter drivers. Transport spokesperson for the Local Government Association, Counsellor David Renard says: "While most councils have been able to keep services running, some may find that their gritting services are affected in the same way that some have seen waste collection services impacted"

With this in mind, let's look at how you can stay safe on the road in snow and ice.

How to drive on snow

If you've got a journey planned, it's important to check the forecast and see what the weather might do. This is particularly important if you've got a long trip ahead of you. Allow extra time for your journey when necessary, and if possible avoid heading out onto the roads when you know that it's going to be snowing.

If you have no choice and need to make a journey in the snow, make sure you follow these steps:

Before you drive

- Plan to stick to major roads where possible as they're more likely to be gritted
- Make sure you're aware of alternative routes in case of accidents
- Make sure your windows, mirrors, lights and roof are all clear of snow
- Demist your windscreen if necessary
- Check your tyres to make sure they have enough tread to grip in the ice and snow
- Use screenwash that protects to at least -5 C to stop it freezing.
- Make sure your mobile is fully charged and you have the number of your breakdown cover provider
- Wear warm, appropriate and comfortable footwear.

On the journey

The best advice for driving in harsh weather conditions can be summed up in two words: slow down. But if you're in need of more tips, here are a few:

- Accelerate gently, and get to the highest gear as quickly as you can
- Check if your car has winter mode and activate it if it does
- If you don't have winter mode, move off in second gear to reduce wheel slip
- Leave as much as 10 times the recommended stopping distance between you and the car in front.
- Leave plenty of room before an uphill to maintain a constant speed without changing gear
- Avoid braking downhill unless necessary and use a low gear

- Brake before turning the wheel when approaching a bend.
- If you lose grip on a bend, take your foot off the accelerator and make sure your wheel is facing the direction you want to go.
- If you skid, steer into it gently. If you skid to the left steer gently to the left. Don't slam on the brakes.
- Use your dipped headlights in heavy snow to ensure lights on the back of the car are showing.

If visibility drops, turn on your fog lights. Make sure you switch them off again if visibility improves so you don't dazzle other drivers.

Keep to a sensible speed, drive calmly, and make sure your braking, accelerating and gear changes are all as smooth as possible. You may also wish to consider snow socks, winter tyres and even snow chains.

How to drive on ice

Driving on ice can seem scary, but it's manageable if you know what you're doing. If you think there's a risk of ice on the roads you should:

- Not travel much as things can go wrong rapidly
- Avoid stamping on the brakes, harsh acceleration and aggressive steering as these could all make things worse
- Accelerate slowly and use brakes gently when needed
- Leave longer stopping distances between you and the car ahead
- Stick to main roads as much as possible as they're more likely to be salted and ice-free.

Black ice is one of the biggest hazards of winter driving so you need to make sure you know when you've hit it and what to do. Ironically, black ice isn't really black. It's a thin layer of transparent ice, which blends in with the colour of the road beneath it. This means you're less likely to notice it, meaning you risk driving over it at speed, causing you to skid.

It's most common in areas such as tunnels and roads under tree cover as they don't get much sun.

If you do hit black ice, try to stay calm. Don't brake, but take your foot off the accelerator and try to steer straight until you pass over the ice.

Carry a winter breakdown kit

Having your car break down in winter could have much more serious implications than at other times of the year. It's wise to keep a few essentials in your car in case of mechanical problems – or in case you get stranded in particularly wintry conditions.

Here's a list of things you may want to keep in your breakdown kit in case of an emergency:

Shovel Torch Ice scraper and de-icer Jump-start cables

First-aid kit Reflective warning sign Mobile phone and charger

Warm clothes and blankets for you and any passengers; Snacks and a warm drink in a thermos

Snow grips for your shoes (or boots) in case you need to walk to safety

Make sure your breakdown and contact (ICE) information is saved in your phone and you've got enough charge.

How to make sure your vehicle is ready for the winter roads

A few simple checks could help you make sure your car is ready to deal with whatever the weather has to throw at it. If you're concerned about your brakes or your battery, it's sensible to invest in a proper service before the bad weather hits.

Here are some of the main factors to consider:

Tyres

Your car needs to retain its grip in wet or icy conditions, so check your tyres are in good order, and pressures are correct for the load you are carrying. The minimum legal limit for tyre tread is 1.6mm, but at least 3mm of tread is recommended for winter driving.

It might also be worth considering winter tyres. They have a higher silica content, which gives you better grip in the cold and wet. Simon Hiorns, Retail Director at Protyre says:

“Winter tyres perform better in temperatures below 7°C, improving stopping distances by up to 11 meters in icy conditions. If you're travelling to Europe be sure to check their laws, as some countries require you to drive on winter tyres during the colder months.”

Fuel

It sounds obvious, but check you have more than enough for your journey and remember that your car typically uses up more fuel in colder weather. Running out of fuel in winter could be potentially disastrous, particularly if you have to face the snow and ice to get refuelled. Keep an eye out for petrol stations and top up early before you have any issues.

Visibility

Make sure all windows and windscreens are properly de-iced and condensation free before you set off.

All-round visibility is very important, and it is not enough to simply scrape a hole in your windscreen to peer out of. As well as increasing the risk of accidents, this could lead to you being stopped by the police.

Check your wiper blades are in good condition as well, and ensure you've got enough screen wash and that it will work in colder weather. Lower quality washes could freeze, causing you even more problems.

Lights

It's not always immediately obvious if one of your car's lights have stopped working so make sure you've checked. You're likely to need your fog and dipped headlights – so you need to check these too. Get a friend or family member to assess your brake and reverse lights if necessary.

Consider breakdown cover

Adequate breakdown cover could be crucial at this time of year, and it should give you the peace of mind of knowing you won't end up stranded in the cold.

Remember to take a contact phone number for the insurance company with you on all journeys, and check your policy so you know exactly what you're covered for.

Contributions:

Please send any inclusions for the “Open Roads” newsletter to:

The Secretary,
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or email

secretary@roadar-northeast.org.uk

Many Thanks

Contact Us:

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or via our website

About RoADAR NorthEast

We are the local group of RoSPA Advanced Drivers and Riders (RoADAR); a team of volunteers promoting safe and more rewarding Driving and Riding through improved skills.

As one of over fifty regional groups throughout the UK, we provide the training and support you need to pass the RoADAR Advanced Driving or Riding test, and become a full member of the national RoADAR organisation.

We are a non-profit organisation whose members pay a small annual subscription to cover the running costs of the the group. Training for members is free.

Everyone involved in the group participates on a volunteer basis. The Driving and Riding tutors

Does my insurance cover me in a red weather warning?

Yes, you should be covered by your insurance in the event of a red weather warning. If you're concerned or just want peace of mind, then get in touch with your car insurance company or check your terms and conditions.

Comprehensive car insurance should cover you for accidents that happen during bad weather. Both comprehensive and third-party insurance should also cover you for damage to someone else's car.

However, if an accident happens as a result of irresponsible driving – regardless of the weather – then your insurer might not pay out.

John's tip:

Only buy concentrated screenwash. The “ready to use” is mostly water, why carry that home when you can mix it yourself? And check the dilution and the temperature it protects to.