

Drive safely in rain and fog.

When it's raining, water that builds up on roadways can cause tires to lose traction or "hydroplane." Heavy rain and fog dramatically decrease your ability to see and be seen. While most people know to slow down in rainy or foggy conditions, there are other safety tips that will help to keep you, and those who share the road with you, safer when weather conditions are less than perfect.

Driving in Rain

1. Make sure all your vehicle lights are in working order, and always turn on your headlights when driving in rain or fog, even during daylight. Maryland law requires drivers to turn on headlights whenever windshield wipers are in use.
2. Periodically check your windshield wiper blades for wear. Worn blades can smear water on your windshield instead of clear it, significantly decreasing your visibility during rainy conditions.
3. Exercise extreme caution when driving in the rain immediately after a long dry spell. In dry conditions, oil and grease build up on the roadway. When oil and grease mix with water from a new rainfall, the roadway becomes slippery.
4. Tires are a critical part of your vehicle. Regularly check that they are inflated to recommended pressure and that they have sufficient tread depth to ensure good traction. When water builds up on the roadway, it's possible to hydroplane at speeds as low as 35 mph. Always slow down when it's raining and allow more travel time.

5. To maintain a safe "space cushion" when driving in rain or fog, increase your following distance to at least 4 seconds. Extreme conditions will require even more following distance to maintain a safe space cushion.
6. In reduced visibility conditions, drivers tend to follow the taillights of vehicles in front of them. Therefore, avoid stopping on the shoulder of a roadway, but if you must, stop as far off the road as possible, turn off your headlights, and turn on your emergency hazard lights.

Driving in Fog

7. When driving in fog, use low beam headlights only. High beams will reflect back off the fog and impair visibility even more.
8. Slow down so that you don't drive "beyond your headlights." This means not being able to stop in time for a hazard you can't see ahead of the area illuminated by your headlights.
9. In foggy conditions, listen for approaching traffic you cannot see. Open your car windows a little to better hear the sounds of moving vehicles before they can be seen.



Be Especially Cautious in Freezing Rain

10. If there's a chance of freezing rain, as sometimes happens in winter in Maryland, you must double your precautions. When surface temperatures are near 32 degrees F., rain can freeze on the roadway, especially on bridges and overpasses, creating smooth sheets of ice. "Black ice" is the term used when rain freezes smoothly on asphalt roadways and can't be seen until it's too late. When it's raining and temperatures are near freezing, be extra alert for ice and slow down accordingly.



Adapted from information found online at www.safete.com, www.weather.com, www.edmunds.com and www.nsc.org.

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