Emergencies and Special Situations

This chapter suggests ways to handle emergencies and special situations. Remember, driving requires complete attention. Unexpected events can happen very quickly, leaving little time to react. Plan ahead.

**REMEMBER THESE IMPORTANT SAFETY TIPS**

- Never stop on a freeway except for an emergency. If you must stop, turn on the emergency hazard flashers, slow down gradually and pull all the way off the pavement as soon as safely possible.

- When stopped, always be alert for approaching and passing vehicles and stay well off the roadway. Raise the hood, tie a handkerchief on the antenna, driver-side door handle or mirror, then lock the doors and wait for assistance. If you must leave your vehicle, close the hood and lock the vehicle.

- When traveling alone or with children at night, it may be a good idea to stay in the vehicle with windows closed and doors locked. It is dangerous and illegal to walk on a freeway.

- If your vehicle’s hood opens while driving, slow down and look through the windshield between the hood and dashboard or out the window for a place to stop safely.

- If your accelerator sticks and you need to stop suddenly, shift to neutral and apply steady pressure to the brakes. Otherwise, shift to neutral, check for traffic, steer off the roadway, apply the brakes and come to a stop. Turn off the ignition and correct the problem before proceeding.

- Keep an emergency safety kit in your vehicle. Make sure to include jumper cables, mobile phone charger, shovel, tow...
rope, sand or kitty litter, flashlight and batteries, first-aid kit, emergency flares, battery operated radio, nonperishable food (energy bars and water), small tool kit (including duct tape), blanket and maps.

- Use a flashlight, flares or warning triangles to warn other drivers of a disabled vehicle at night. Put flares at least 100 feet behind the vehicle at the side of the road. For added protection, place some more flares beside and 100 feet ahead of the vehicle.
- Never turn the ignition to the “lock” position while your vehicle is in motion. This will cause the steering to lock. Once the steering locks, if you try to turn the steering wheel, you will lose control of the vehicle.
- Never leave keys in the car or ignition.
- Make sure you have enough gas to get to your destination.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Is there a police or fire station, service station or other business open nearby if you should need help?
- Do not hitchhike or pick up hitchhikers.

**Braking**

Under normal conditions, you apply a steady, firm push on the brake pedal to slow and stop your vehicle.

In extreme conditions, such as on snow, ice or in an emergency stop on dry pavement, how you brake depends on your braking system.

With antilock brakes, apply the brake with hard, firm pressure from the start and maintain this pressure until you have stopped. You may feel or hear vibrations or pulsations, this is normal.

In a vehicle without antilock brakes, apply the brakes just hard enough to not lock the wheels. If the wheels do lock, release pressure and apply the brakes again. This method of braking is sometimes referred to as “threshold” or “controlled” braking.
**SKIDS**

When driving on snow or a slippery road, slow down gradually. Test the vehicle’s brakes lightly to get a feel for the road. Most skids happen when a driver tries to turn too quickly or stop suddenly on slippery pavement.

To prevent a skid in vehicles with standard brakes, use steady pressure on the brakes without locking them. This method allows the wheels to turn, maintaining steering control. If the vehicle has full antilock brakes, maintain brake pressure and steer.

If the vehicle begins to skid, remain calm and do the following:

- Take your foot off the accelerator.
- Turn the front wheels only enough to keep them pointed in the direction you want to go and no farther.
- Be prepared for a secondary skid in the opposite direction.
- Again, turn the wheels in the direction you want to go. Then straighten the wheels to bring the vehicle under control.

**DRIVING IN BAD WEATHER**

Preventive maintenance prior to the winter season is the best way to ensure safe travel. Regularly check fluid levels such as power steering, brake, windshield washer and oil.

Make sure the antifreeze is strong enough to prevent freezing of the engine and fresh enough to prevent rust. In cold weather, you may also want to change the windshield washer fluid to one containing an antifreezing agent.

Leave extra time and drive more slowly when it is foggy, raining or snowing, and conditions are hazardous. Allow greater following distance in bad weather. In cold weather, bridges and underpasses freeze before the road does.

**RAIN AND FOG**

- When it begins to rain, the roads are most slippery during the first half-hour. This is because oil dropped from passing vehicles has not been washed away. Be especially cautious at
intersections where oil deposits may be heavier. Slow down and allow at least twice the normal following distance.

- Brakes may become wet after driving through deep water or during heavy rain. Test them, as they may pull to one side or the other or they may not hold at all. Slow down and gently push on the brake pedal until the brakes work properly again.

- When your tires ride on top of the water on a wet road, you are hydroplaning, which can result in a loss of control. Worn tires, low tire pressure or driving too fast contribute to hydroplaning.

- If a flooded road is blocked off by safety barricades, do not drive around them. The barricades are there because it is unsafe for vehicles. There may be debris or power lines in the water or the road may have been washed away. If there are no barricades in place at a flooded road, consider finding an alternate route. If you do try to drive through, do so with extreme caution. In addition to the hazards already mentioned, deep water can damage your car’s engine.

- Drive slowly in fog. Turn on the low-beam headlights and be prepared to stop quickly. When fog becomes so thick that you cannot see at all, pull off the road. Turn on the four-way emergency flashers and wait for the fog to lift.

**Using Your Headlights**

Nighttime driving is hazardous because your visibility is reduced.

- Headlights must be turned on one half-hour after sunset until one half-hour before sunrise and at other times when visibility is reduced. Use your low beams when it is foggy, raining or snowing during the day. If you are having trouble seeing other vehicles, they will have trouble seeing you. Turn on your headlights whenever you are in doubt.

- Headlights must be on any time there is not enough daylight to see people and vehicles clearly at 500 feet. It is illegal to use only parking lights when headlights are required.
• You should be able to stop within the clear distance you can see ahead. When driving at night, it is critical to drive within the range of the headlights.
• It is illegal to use or even flash high-beam headlights within 500 feet of an oncoming vehicle. Also, dim your lights for pedestrians and cyclists.
• If oncoming drivers do not dim their headlights, keep your eyes on the right edge of the road ahead. Do not look directly into oncoming headlights. The glare may blind you for several seconds. A dirty windshield will make headlight glare worse.
• Do not use high beams when behind other vehicles. Bright lights shining in their rearview mirrors can be distracting.

**IF AN ONCOMING VEHICLE IS IN YOUR LANE**
• If there is time, tap the horn to warn the other driver.
• Brake hard, but do not lock the wheels if your vehicle does not have antilock brakes.
• Look for an escape route on the right edge of the road.
• Try not to go to the left since the other driver may see you and return to his or her proper lane.
• Try an emergency stop in your lane only if there is enough room and you cannot pull off the road.
• If you cannot stop before hitting another vehicle, try to steer around it. Do not turn more than needed to avoid a crash.

**WHAT TO DO WHEN INVOLVED IN A CRASH**
• Stop and remain at the scene.
• Help secure medical aid for the injured.
• Vehicles involved in crashes that do not result in serious injury or death shall be moved from the main roadway by the driver or a passenger with a valid driver's license if the vehicle can be driven and it is safe to do so. Look for a safe refuge, such as the shoulder, emergency lane or median.
• Exchange names, addresses, driver’s license numbers, registration and insurance information with the other drivers involved in the crash.
• Notify the police if there are injuries or property damage exceeding $1,000.00.
• Leaving the scene of an accident could result in fines, imprisonment or both.

**Vehicle - Deer Crashes**

About 60,000 vehicle-deer crashes take place in Michigan each year and officials suspect that as many as half of all such crashes are unreported. Vehicle-deer crashes are costly. The average crash results in $2,100 in damages, usually to the vehicle’s front end. Annual costs for these crashes statewide are estimated at $130 million. If you do hit a deer, report it to local law enforcement, the county sheriff’s office, the Michigan State Police or the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. They can provide a permit to keep it.

**Your best defense is to:**

• Stay aware, awake, alert and sober.
• Always wear your seat belt. Seat belts are your best defense in any collision.
• Be especially alert in fall and spring, but remember that vehicle-deer crashes can occur at any time of the year.
• Watch for deer crossing signs.
• Slow down if you see one deer. Deer frequently travel in groups. Chances are there are others nearby.
• Be especially alert for deer at dawn and dusk.
• Do not rely on gimmicks. Flashing your high-beam headlights or honking your horn will not deter deer.

**If a crash with a deer is unavoidable:**

• Do not swerve.
• Brake firmly.
• Hold onto the steering wheel with both hands.
• Come to a controlled stop.
• Steer your vehicle well off the roadway.