

Preparation, safety key to winter driving

By Tia Rancourt

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team would like to remind all travelers that extra precautions need to be taken while driving in Northern Nevada and California mountain areas with snow and ice. Along with potential hazardous road conditions, motorists can expect extreme delays due to snow conditions or accidents. We recommend following these tips to ensure a safe trip to your destination.

- Ensure your vehicle is stocked with extra warm clothing, food, water, medications, cell phone, a shovel, and other survival supplies in the event you become stuck on a mountain road. Check your vehicle's battery, tire tread, windshield wipers, and anti-freeze. Tires should be properly inflated. Keep windows clear and put no-freeze fluid in the window washer reservoir. Carry snow melt, Jonny Cat, or sand in the event you become stuck in the snow.
- Make sure your vehicle's gas tank is full before leaving on any trip. Keep the tank at least half full to avoid gas tank freeze-up.
- If your vehicle has on-demand four-wheel drive, make certain all drivers are familiar with engaging the four-wheel drive function.
- Practice cold weather driving. During the daylight, rehearse maneuvers slowly on ice or snow in an empty lot. Steer into a skid. Know what your brakes will do. Use steady constant pressure on ABS equipped vehicles and pump non-anti-lock brakes.
- Check road conditions before leaving. (The state icons on

Lake Tahoe News' home page go the respective departments of transportation.)

- Plan your route and leave early if necessary for weather conditions. Be familiar with maps and directions and let others know your route and arrival time.
- Leave headlights on while driving in snowy conditions to increase vehicle visibility. Drive carefully. Even when the roads appear dry, patches of ice tend to accumulate on curves and bridges even when the rest of the roadway appears clear. Increase distance between your vehicle and those ahead for safe stopping.
- If you are driving slower than the traffic around you, use turnouts so others may pass.

Winter weather drivers must consider their personal needs, as well as making sure their automobile is ready to face unforeseen conditions. Avoid driving in known hazardous conditions if possible, but when driving is necessary, time spent in preparation is the best defense. Being prepared can help you make good choices if incidents occur.

Tia Rancourt works for North Lake Tahoe Fire District.