



Reliable transportation is important – most especially in Montana’s winter and frigid temps ... and Montana’s miles of open country. While you should keep your vehicle in top operating condition all year for general safety and fuel economy, it is especially important in winter. Breakdowns, line freeze-ups, bald skidding tires, iced-over windshields and more can put you in a situation that is unpleasant at best and deadly at worst. Proper winterization will go a long way to keeping you as safe as possible out on the road.

Before temperatures drop toward freezing and winter shows up, check:

- Ignition system
- Fuel system
- Battery
- Belts
- Fluid levels
- Proper grade oil
- Antifreeze
- Cooling system
- Brakes
- Defroster
- Exhaust system
- Wiper blades & windshield washer fluid
- Lights
- Tires / snow tires; tire tread & pressure

PREPARING YOUR VEHICLE FOR WINTER DRIVING

Some general tips for winter driving

- Always fill the fuel tank before entering open country, even for a short distance; stop to fill up long before the tank begins to run low. Keeping your tank as full as possible, above half ideally, will minimize condensation and that will help prevent gas-line-related freezes and other problems. Plus, the “extra” fuel can help if you become stopped or stalled and need to run the engine for heat or drive much further than you anticipated.
- Plan your route in advance and use up-to-date road maps. Wherever possible, keep to main roads as they are more likely to be plowed and/or sanded in bad weather. And always have an alternate route planned. Especially when traveling distance, in rural areas or out in bad weather, let at least one friend or family member know your route, destination and expected arrival time.
- A citizens band (CB) radio and/or mobile phone can be useful to you or another stranded motorist in case of an emergency.
- Clear all windows and lights of frost and snow.
- Drive with your headlights on.
- Stock your car with basic winter equipment: A snow / ice scraper and brush, small shovel, jumper cables, tow chain, and a bag of sand or cat litter for tire traction.
- Also include road flares, a blanket, heavy boots, warm clothing and flashlight with batteries. (Remember to reverse the batteries inside the flashlight to avoid it accidentally switching on and draining the batteries. Warm the batteries between your legs before using them.) In addition, it's good to have at least a gallon of drinking water in your car where it can be accessed because, even in a Montana winter, there may not be clean snow available to melt if water is needed in an emergency.
- Keep an emergency survival kit in the car. You can pack the items into a three-pound coffee can.

Survival kit in a can for winter driving emergencies

Here's what you'll need:

- A 2- or 3-pound metal coffee can. Punch 3 holes just under the lip of the can's open end, equal distance apart.* You'll store the other items inside this can.
- 60-inch length of twine or heavy string; cut into 3 equal pieces.*
- Three large safety pins.*
- 1 candle, 2-inch diameter.*

- 1 pocketknife, reasonably sharp; or substitute with scissors.
- 3 pieces of bright cloth, each 2 inches wide x 36 inches long. These can be tied to an antenna or door handle as a flag for assistance.
- Several packets of soup, hot chocolate, tea, bouillon cubes, etc., that can be mixed into melted snow to provide warmth and nutrition.
- Sturdy nonmetal spoon.
- Nonperishable snacks such as nuts / peanuts, protein / energy bars, dried fruit, and even a little chocolate. These will provide you with some energy and comfort in stressful times.
- Warm socks and gloves / glove liners, depending on what will fit in the can (cotton is not recommended as it provides no insulation when wet).
- 2 packages of book matches.
- 1 sun shield blanket or 2 large green or black plastic trash bags (can be used to reflect body heat).
- 1 penlight and batteries (keep separate).

If you have a 3-pound can, you will have additional room for band-aids, aspirin, small radio, etc. If there is still room left, increase the quantity of any of the above items or add other items you think might be necessary. When complete, place a warm knit cap over the kit and carry in passenger compartment – inside the vehicle is recommended in case you go into a ditch and can't get to or open the trunk.

* To get water for soup, tea, etc.:

1. Empty the coffee can and fill with clean snow.
2. Tie one end of each of the 3 strings to a hole in can, and the other end to a safety pin.
3. Secure the safety pins to the vehicle's interior roof liner to create a “hanging bucket.”
4. Use the can lid or other nonflammable flat surface to hold the candle under the hanging can.
5. Light the candle to melt the snow into warm water for soups and drinking. (Please be careful with both the flame and the water.)

Other items you may want to keep in the vehicle:

- A charged cellphone.
- Large plastic garbage bag.
- Pencil stub and paper.
- Plastic whistle.