



TIS THE SEASON A REFRESHER ON WINTER DRIVING

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While returning home from opening weekend of Utah's deer hunt, I was travelling westbound through the Strawberry Valley on Highway 40, approaching Daniel's Summit. A snowstorm just passed through the area. The skies began clearing and the temperatures dropped. Snow appeared to blanket the highway, but it was soon apparent that the snow turned to sheet ice. Approaching the summit, a big rig going westbound was stopped in the roadway unable to gain the necessary traction to continue up and over summit. A fender bender between passenger cars already occurred and a small truck was turned sideways in the road in the eastbound travel lanes. As I crept over the summit, two more big rigs heading eastbound were stopped on the highway blocking traffic. The semi-truck drivers were out of their cabs trying to attach chains to their tractor's tires. This was the first real winter driving conditions I observed on Utah's roadways during the fall season this year. It reminded me of the necessities of winter driving which are applicable to all drivers, but especially to our needed professional commercial drivers operating semi-trucks on Utah's roadways. Here is a brief refresher on winter driving that will help all drivers travel safely this coming winter.

Patience! Patience is of utmost importance when operating vehicles in winter conditions. Winter conditions require us to slow down. We will need more time to travel to our destinations. Recognizing the old moniker that "time is money," the money isn't worth being involved in a serious accident. Slow down! The overwhelming majority of winter driving vehicle accidents are caused by a driver travelling too fast for the conditions. As attorneys, we see this repeatedly when dealing with accidents. The faster the speed the worse the accident. When big rigs are involved, the consequences are often catastrophic. I would recommend turning on your favorite Christmas music station and taking it slow. If conditions warrant, get off the roadways and wait for the storm to pass and the plows to do their thing. This will help ensure you are returning to your loved ones over the holiday season.

Preparation! The old Boy Scout motto of "Be Prepared" is applicable to driving in winter conditions. This includes carrying the proper equipment. Just as important as having the right equipment is knowing how to use the right equipment.

For example, be familiar with putting tire chains on your tractor. Have a warm coat and good winter gloves so you can touch the cold metal and lay on the ground if necessary. I watched during the recent deer hunt as a fellow hunter tried to put tire chains on his truck so he could make it out of a precarious situation. When it was apparent he didn't know how to put his tire chains on his truck, our hunting party assisted him. He told us he had never put chains on his truck before. Don't be this guy! Practice putting your chains on your tires so when the time comes that you need them, you will be ready and efficient with the tire chains. This will also keep you out of the cold. Nobody likes being cold. Other considerations would be carrying a shovel, hammer, ice melt and/or kitty litter. Traction is everything when driving in winter conditions! Make sure you have the right equipment to maintain traction on the roadways. Be prepared.

Precaution! Take the necessary precautions while operating your big rigs on Utah's roadways. This includes slowing down. This needs to be reiterated and cannot be overstated. It will save heartache and lives. Driving the speed limit is usually way too fast for winter conditions. Slow down to always keep control of your truck. Give the necessary space and buffer zones to other vehicles around you. This will allow you to brake effectively and maneuver as necessary. The perception reaction time is a real thing, and you need much more reaction time while operating a semi-truck. The goal is to maximize the distance between you and other vehicles all around you. Likewise, your pre-trip inspections of your rig should be detailed and meticulous. Keep an eye on your trailer tires. Make sure they are rolling, and the brakes are not frozen. Look for frozen valves, check your taillights, etc. More so than anything, use good judgment! You are professional drivers who we depend on, especially during the holiday seasons. Professionals are professionals for a reason. Your experience and judgment are foremost, even if this means parking your truck and extending a run. Using good judgment when experiencing winter driving conditions is key to being safe. Be safe and take the necessary precautions.

If involved in an accident, understand your company's policies and procedures. Know who to call and what to do. This is obviously not the ideal scenario but being prepared in case of an accident will help yourself, your company, and your attorneys (if it comes to that). Have a safe and wonderful Holiday season!



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