

With one of the worst winter storms in Illinois history passing through early February, it has become extremely important to practice safe winter driving in order to avoid [automobile accidents](#). Snowy and icy conditions can easily cause your vehicle to skid off-road or into a ditch. Roadway departures have accounted for over 53% of [auto accidents](#) in Illinois. In 2009, the Illinois Department of Traffic reported 4,844 traffic accident injuries as a direct result of ice or snow on the roadways. Although these statistics demonstrate that you should completely avoid driving in bad winter weather, this is not always a realistic scenario. Here are a few beneficial tips to help you handle driving in dangerous winter conditions.

- Decrease your driving speed, stay alert and leave yourself at least a ten second following space in order to maintain a proper stopping distance. Also allow plenty of additional travel time – you should not be in a hurry under hazardous driving conditions.
- Infrequently traveled roads, bridges and overpasses will freeze first due to being exposed or in shaded areas. These roadways may remain icy even in temperatures that are above freezing and can develop black ice. Black ice is a thin layer of ice that resembles a water puddle, but is one of the most slippery road conditions you may encounter.
- If you begin to notice your rear wheels are skidding, immediately take your foot off the accelerator and begin steering in the direction of your skid. For example, if your rear wheels are sliding left, then steer left. If your rear wheels begin sliding the other way as you recover, steer toward that side.
- If your front wheels begin to skid, release the accelerator and shift into neutral. Your wheels will begin to gain traction as they skid sideways, at which point you should steer in the direction you want to go. Then shift back into drive and accelerate slowly.
- When your car starts skidding, anti-lock brakes require that you keep a steady pressure on the brake pedal, which will repeatedly cause your brakes to pulse in order to slow down your vehicle. If your car does not have anti-lock brakes, you must pump your brakes to stop your vehicle.
- Do not attempt to pass a snow plow. Snow plows have a very limited field of vision and will be unable to observe you attempting to pass them. Also, the road conditions in front of a snow plow are likely very dangerous, so it is advisable to stay 15 car lengths behind a snow plow.
- Snow banks greatly impair visibility, especially when you are turning onto a street. Turn slowly and carefully because not only will you be unable to see an oncoming vehicle, but they also cannot see you.
- Keep an eye out for narrow roadways after a snowstorm. A two lane road may become one lane or a half lane depending on where the snow is plowed. Turning lanes may also become unusable, so expect heavy traffic conditions when this occurs.
- Avoid distractions such as talking on your cell phone when driving in dangerous winter conditions. Also, do not text while you are driving in hazardous weather. Texting while driving is now illegal in Illinois as of January 1, 2010.

Keeping these driving tips in mind will greatly decrease your chances of being involved in an automobile accident. In addition to safe driving, you should check your local traffic reports for any hazardous road conditions. Also remember to test that your car is in proper working condition to handle winter elements. It is important to keep maintenance of your vehicle, including the wiper blades, tires, windshield fluid, brakes, etc. However, as stated before, the best [advice](#) is to stay off the road during dangerous conditions in order to avoid potential [accidents](#) and [injury](#).