

Winter is coming. We already had a preview of winter driving in October and as we move into the winter months, we can be assured there is more winter driving ahead. Now is an excellent time to make sure that your vehicle is ready to safely carry you through the winter driving conditions to come.

To begin, let's talk about where the rubber meets the road. Your tires are the critical link between your moving vehicle and the road surface. To do their job properly and legally, tires need to have adequate tread depth. State law requires tires to have at least 2/32 of an inch of tread. A quick way to check your tire tread depth is to place a penny in the tread grooves of your tire with the top of Abe Lincoln's head toward the center of the tire. If the top of the tread surface doesn't cover Lincoln's hair, you need new tires. If your tires are nearing this legal threshold your car will struggle on the snow and ice ahead and you should consider getting fresh tires with adequate tread depth. While you are looking at your tires, you should check the tire pressure in each one. As the weather cools, the pressure in your tires may drop. Properly inflated tires will last longer and provide better grip on the road. Your vehicle will have a sticker on the driver's door frame pillar showing the manufacturer's recommended tire pressure for each tire.

In order to drive safely, you must be able to see where you are going. In our Minnesota winters, that means having good windshield wipers and a full reservoir of washer fluid. As we make our way through winter, our vehicles will encounter everything from frost and freezing rain to snow and road spray. Make sure your vehicle can clear all these things out of your field of vision. Find that window scraper/snowbrush you put somewhere in the garage last spring and toss it back in your car to ensure you're able to get ready to roll in the morning. Check your headlights and taillights to ensure all are bright and functioning properly. Once you know they are working, remember to turn your headlights on during snow, sleet, fog, or other precipitation.

While you are putting things back into the car for the winter, make sure you've got your winter survival kit along. A winter survival kit can keep you safe and comfortable in the event you get stranded somewhere while on the road. A good winter survival kit will include things like small candles and matches, a small pocket knife, a red bandanna or cloth to let passing drivers know you need help, pencil and paper, large plastic garbage bag to help you stay warm and dry, safety pins, a whistle, non-perishable snacks that are high in protein and calories, a cell phone adapter to charge your phone, a plastic flashlight and spare batteries, and a warm blanket.

Now that your vehicle is ready to roll on down the road, make sure it is also ready to stop. Check the amount of friction material left on your brake pads and replace any that are worn out. Almost all cars on the road today have an anti-lock brake system (ABS) on board. If your dashboard is staring at you with a trouble indicator light that

says something is wrong with the ABS, have a qualified mechanic take a look. ABS systems are very useful in the low-traction environments found during winter driving months. A functioning ABS system could be the difference between a pulse-quickening moment that you drive away from unscathed and a crash that results in injury or property damage.

Do yourself and your vehicle a favor by spending a few moments making sure you are both ready for the cold and snowy weeks ahead. For more crime prevention and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.