



Winter



Driving

in



Wyoming

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I. INTRODUCTION

Stay in your car

Not a very smooth introduction into winter driving, but because this is the most important thing to remember if you are ever stranded in a blizzard, it cannot be over-emphasized: **STAY PUT.**

Do not attempt to walk for help. Disorientation and/or hypothermia occurs quickly in blowing and drifting snow. Your car will provide you with the best possible shelter and you are more likely to be found by staying in it.

STAY IN YOUR CAR. It's your best friend at this point. The following is an article reprinted with permission from the *Wyoming Tribune-Eagle*:



Cheyenne man OK after spending 3 days snowbound in truck

Reprinted from Wyoming Tribune-Eagle, Oct. 28, 1997

BRIGHTON, Colo. (AP) - A Cheyenne man survived three days in his truck after he lost his way in white out conditions caused by the weekend blizzard and ended up in a snow-covered field.

Jim Tidwell drove to Fort Collins, Colo., from Cheyenne on Friday for a doctor's appointment.

On his way back on Interstate 25 Friday, the snowstorm struck.

"I didn't know where in the hell I was going," he told KUSA-TV from his bed at Platte Valley Medical Center.

"You couldn't see. That's how I got goofed up. All the signs were covered up with snow."

On Monday, Colorado State Patrol troopers happened upon Tidwell. He was alive, but suffering from hypothermia.

His truck was found near Denver International Airport, at least a half mile from the nearest highway.

Tidwell, who is a diabetic, said he survived on candy bars and fought boredom and fear.

Hospital officials said Tidwell had no other complications and would probably be released today.

II. PREPAREDNESS BEFORE

Season unpredictable

Wyoming winter weather can be very unpredictable. In addition, it can occur anytime between the months of October and April each year and may include snow, ice, sleet, high winds and sub-freezing temperatures.

Although few people are directly killed by severe winter storms, deaths may occur as a result of dealing with the hazards of this season. Included with this may be heart attacks from shoveling heavy snow, traffic accidents on icy roads and carbon monoxide poisoning. The first step to being prepared is becoming familiar with the dangers and terminology associated with winter weather.

Thank you to the National Weather Service for the following information.



Significant winter weather (ie. heavy snow, heavy sleet, significant freezing rain or a combination of events) **is expected, but not imminent**, for the watch area. A winter storm watch provides 12 to 36 hours notice of the possibility of severe winter weather.



A significant winter storm or another form of hazardous winter weather **is occurring, imminent or likely** and proper precautions should be taken; e.g., staying indoors and off of roadways.



The most dangerous of all winter weather is occurring or imminent. If you are caught outdoors or on the road, you could lose your life. A blizzard is defined as a combination of winds 35 mph or greater with snow or blowing snow reducing visibility to less than ¼ mile for three or more hours. In blizzards, white-out conditions, deep snow drifts, and frigid wind chills form a life-threatening partnership. You should seek refuge immediately.



Heavy snow warning

At lower elevations, heavy snow warnings are issued when 6 inches or more of snow is expected in 12 hours, or 8 inches or more is expected in 24 hours.

Travel can become difficult or impossible, especially for vehicles without four-wheel drive.



High wind warning

Issued when hazardous winds are occurring or will soon occur across a significant area.

For elevations below 7,500 feet: Sustained winds of 40 mph or greater; gusts to 60 mph or more.

In higher elevations: Sustained winds of 50 mph or greater; gusts to at least 70 mph.

Travel can be dangerous, especially for high profile vehicles like semi-trucks, buses and vans.



Windchill Warning

Wind chill is the combined effect of cold temperatures and wind chilling the body. A warning is issued when wind chills of -50° F or colder with winds of at least 10 mph are occurring or imminent. Frostbite can occur in seconds, and hypothermia within minutes. (See wind chill chart on Page 11.)



Winter weather advisory

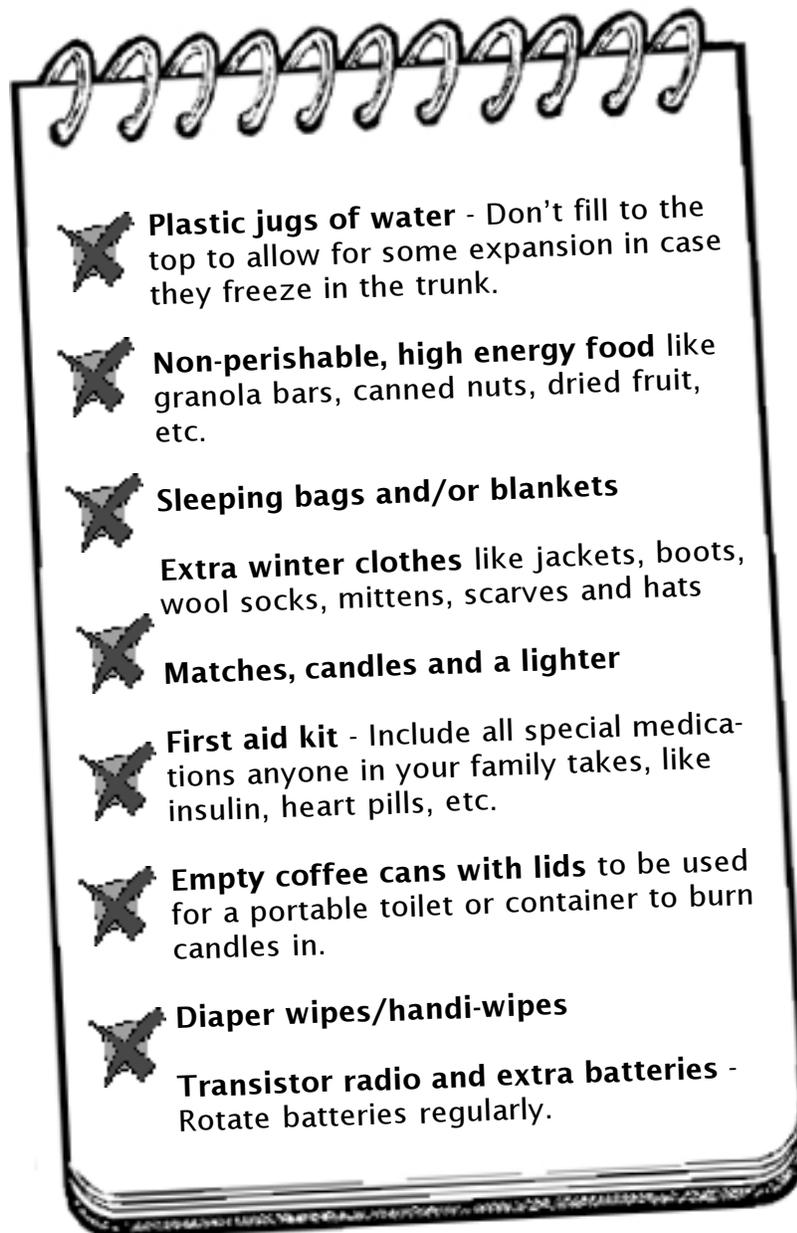
Issued when weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous, especially to motorists. If caution is exercised, however, these situations should not become life-threatening. Examples of conditions for which advisories are issued include snow, blowing snow, frost, freezing drizzle and dangerous wind chill.

Keep an emergency supply kit in your car

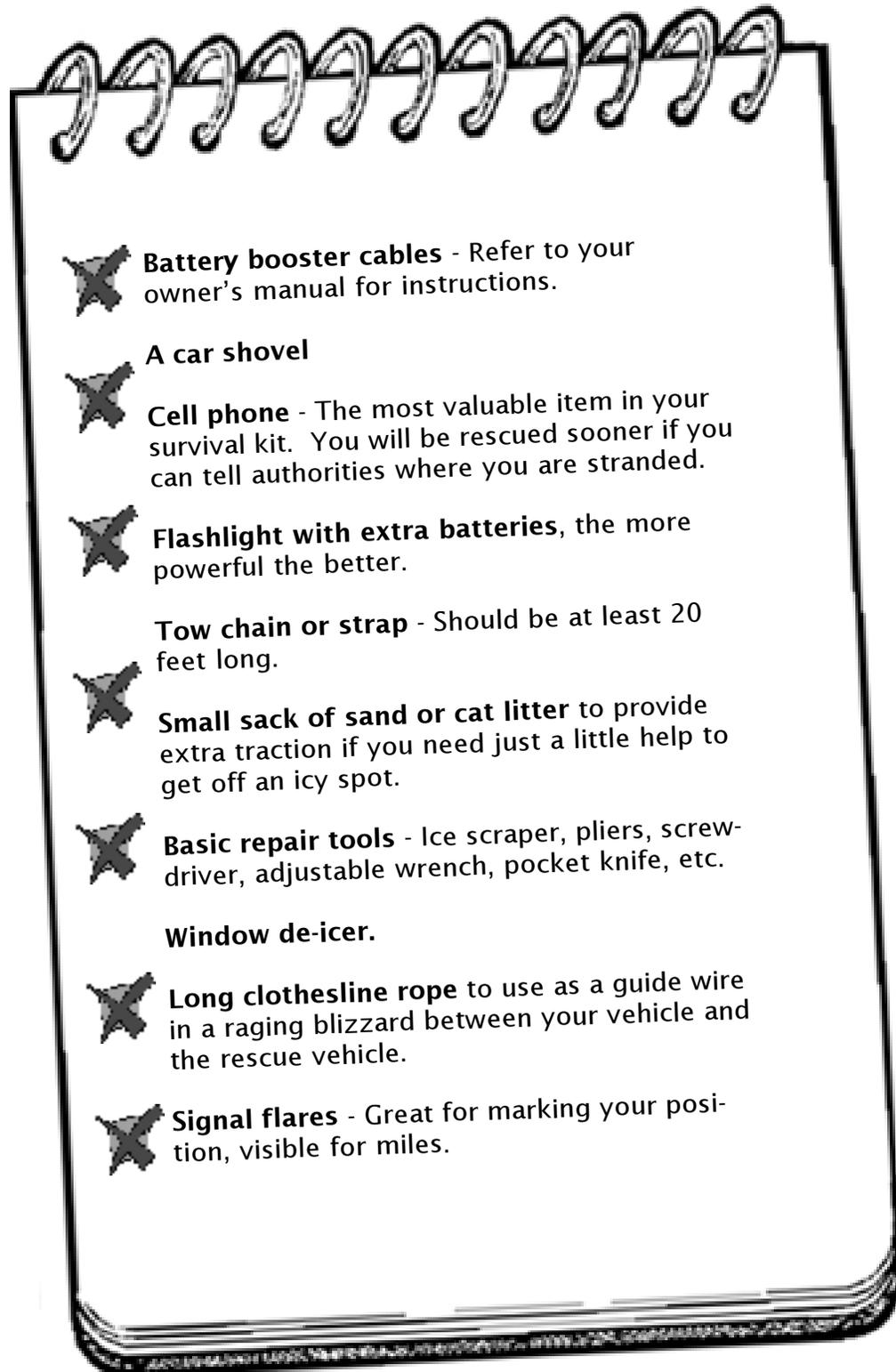
The following checklist contains enough emergency supplies to allow you to successfully wait out a blizzard until help arrives, even if you may be stranded for a couple of days. If you have these items, you should suffer only minor inconveniences but even if you don't have any, it is still safer to stay in your car.

Vehicle survival kit checklist

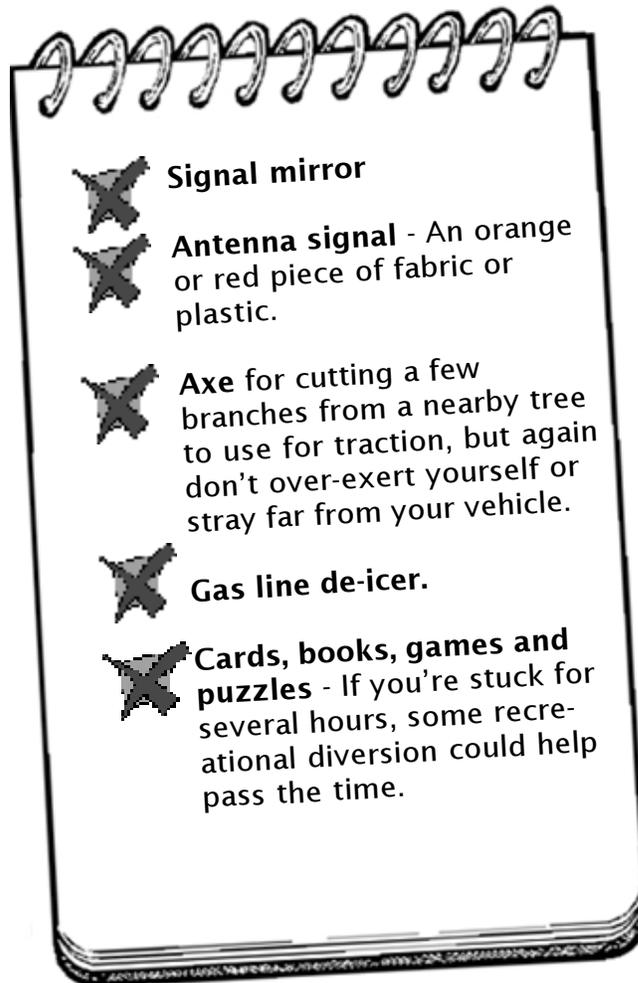
(Not necessarily in order of importance)



Vehicle survival kit checklist continued



Vehicle survival kit checklist continued



Plan ahead

Before you start out on any winter trip, attempt to find out the road conditions for the area in which you will be traveling. It often happens that the sun may be shining where you are but 50 miles down the road there are blizzard conditions. Road and travel information are on pages 17-18. Obey all road closures; failing to do so is illegal. (See Page 14.)

Let someone know when you are leaving, the route you are taking and when you expect to arrive at your destination. If at all possible, travel in a convoy with someone else. As you drive, listen to travel information on local area radio stations. Fast-moving storms may cause changes in road conditions and you may have to change your route. Remember—winter driving may slow you down, so allow yourself extra time to reach your destination.



Vehicle preparations

Anti-freeze should protect to -40° F. Also check your radiator hoses and engine belts.

Battery and ignition system should be in top condition for tough winter starts, and the battery terminals should be clean.

Brakes should be adjusted and properly maintained.

Lights—front and back—should be in working order and checked for cleanliness.

Gas line should be winterized and gas line de-icer added when necessary.

Wipers, heater and defroster should be in working order and properly maintained.

Cell phone or C. B. radio could be very helpful if you become stuck in the snow.

Oil should be changed on a routine basis. Use all-season oil (5W-30, 10W-30, etc.) or winter grade oil (20W or less).

The entire exhaust system should be checked for leaks.

Tires should be studded or at least have winter tread. Have a set of tire chains and know how to put them on.

Extra tire tips



For the best traction in severe snow or icy conditions, use reinforced tire chains. Even if you drive with snow tires, keep a set of chains in the trunk; sometimes chains are the only thing which can provide sufficient traction.

After chains, the next best equipment is studded snow tires. These tires are permissible in Wyoming but other states may ban them or allow them only certain months. (Some drivers use studded snow tires or regular snow tires on

all four wheels even if they don't have a 4-wheel drive vehicle. The logic is that it is beneficial in turning or in stopping.) If you go with snow tires without studs, be sure the tread is deep enough to bite through the snow. A third acceptable option is a good set of all-weather tires.

Also, keep tire pressure at the recommended level. If your car becomes stuck in the snow, some slight deflating of your tires may help. While it does increase wear, deflation puts more tired tread on the surface of the road. If you deflate for traction, re-inflate your tires to their recommended pressure as soon as possible.

Adding extra weight in the trunk of rear-wheel drive vehicles, if done properly, can help traction but may make you more prone to spin-outs. If you add weight for traction, don't overdo it! Make sure the weight is stationary and doesn't shift around (Filled sandbags are best.) Place the weight as close as possible to the drive wheels; weight in the trunk of a front-wheel drive car is useless.

No matter what tires you use, you'll have better luck if you take it easy. Don't spin your tires! This causes friction, which turns snow into ice or digs you deeper into a hole. Apply power gently, go slow, and give yourself plenty of room to stop. Slow down before you attempt any turn. In other words, don't do anything quickly.



III. ACTIONS DURING

Common sense approaches

Whether it is winter or any other time of the year, remember to have everyone in the car fasten their seat belts. It's not only smart—it's the law. There's plenty of proof that seat belts do save lives. If you have to travel in winter weather, here are other tips to help you make it easier for yourself:

- If at all possible, back your car into your garage or parking area so you can drive out front-first. If you don't have a garage, make sure **all** windows are free from snow before you start out. Trouble may come from any direction! Clear off the hood and top, too, so snow doesn't blow on your windows and vents or obscure the visibility of other drivers as it blows off.

- Clear ice and snow from your windshield wiper blades before you turn them on. If they're frozen in place, you may tear off the rubber or ruin your wiper motor. Running the window defroster for a few minutes may help to loosen frozen wipers from the window.

- Make sure both headlights **and** tail lights are free of snow and ice. Too many people clean only their windshield and forget to clean the lights. You want to be able to see where you are going, and you certainly want the people behind you to see your car, especially when you hit your brakes. As you're driving, remember that low beam lights are more effective than high beam lights when encountering fog or falling snow.



- In winter, ruts may form in roadways and cause problems, such as low cars high centering. Ruts are also hard to get out of once you get into them.

- Roads may become narrower due to snow pushed to the sides, making driving especially dangerous on two-lane roads. Slush may be splattered on your window and cause temporary vision impairment.

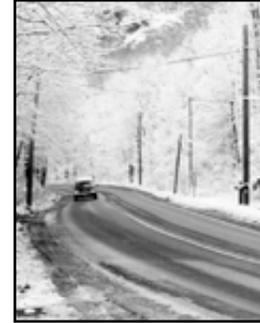
- Icy spots are as much as 10 times more slippery than dry pavement and require slower speeds, more distance between vehicles and overall greater caution. Icy spots are slickest at 32 degrees or warmer when a thin coating of water on top further reduces traction.



- When weather is bad, visibility is poor and road conditions worsen, pedestrians are more susceptible to being hit. As "winter walkers" are bundled up, they can't see as well or move as fast; drivers must be more cautious and courteous to avoid striking an unwary pedestrian.

If you're going up a slippery hill, use the highest gear possible to negotiate it; wheels spin less that way. Most hills can be negotiated if you just take it slow and easy, so don't gun the motor. The main thing is to keep moving and prevent spinning your wheels when coming down a slippery hill. Use a lower gear so your engine compression helps to slow you down.

If you lose control and it looks as though you are going to hit something downhill, try pumping your brakes with short, repeated strokes instead of just holding them there. (This does not apply to anti-locking brake system (ABS) brakes. With ABS brakes, apply the pedal gradually. Use the "squeeze" technique—push on the brake pedal with a steadily increasing pressure.) If that doesn't look like it's going to work, find a way to safely exit the roadway. This is better than ramming a car or sailing through an intersection where there is oncoming traffic.



If you get stuck...

There are a few things you can do to get out, but, above all, remember: **Don't over-exert yourself.**

1. Clear a path with a shovel in front and behind your wheels.
2. Put down some sand or gravel on the path you've cleared. If you don't have this, use the floor mats from your car or even a tarp from your trunk.
3. If you have a standard transmission, you may be able to rock back and forth until you free yourself. With the automatic transmission in neutral, hold your foot on the brake pedal, shift to "drive," release the brake pedal and accelerate slowly so your wheels don't spin. If your tires have been spinning, they are hot. Wait a few minutes for them to cool off; it improves your traction.

When rocking is necessary, let the car roll as far as it can without spinning the tires. When it stops, apply brake pressure, then shift to reverse while holding the brake. Release the brake pedal and repeat the process while avoiding spinning the wheels. When you get out, go slower to avoid a "second encounter" with a car or snowbank.

Winter driving has a detrimental effect on drivers, too. It may make them more nervous, frustrated, tense and, perhaps, even aggressive. Some drivers, no matter what, will try to drive in winter just as they do in the summer. This is why it is even more important to drive defensively in winter and be extra alert for everything that is happening around you. Remember to give yourself extra distance between your vehicle and the vehicles in front of you. This gives you more time to react in an emergency.



Wind chill

Wind chill makes cold weather feel colder. The importance of the wind chill index is an indicator of how to dress properly for winter weather. Wind chill does not affect your car's antifreeze protection. While it will not cause you or your vehicle to cool below the actual air temperature, it will cause heat to dissipate faster.

Equivalent Temperature (°F)

	Calm	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45								
W i n d	35	32	27	22	16	11	6	0	-5	-10	-15	-20	-25	-30	-35	-40	-45	
	30	27	22	16	11	6	0	-5	-10	-15	-21	-26	-31	-36	-42	-47	-52	
	25	22	16	10	3	-3	-9	-15	-22	-27	-34	-40	-46	-52	-58	-64	-71	-77
	20	16	9	2	-5	-11	-18	-25	-31	-38	-45	-51	-58	-65	-72	-78	-85	-92
	15	12	4	-3	-10	-17	-24	-31	-39	-46	-53	-60	-67	-74	-81	-88	-95	-103
S P e e d	25	8	1	-7	-15	-22	-29	-36	-44	-51	-59	-66	-74	-81	-88	-96	-103	-110
	30	6	-2	-10	-18	-25	-33	-41	-49	-56	-64	-71	-79	-86	-93	-101	-109	-116
	35	4	-4	-12	-20	-27	-35	-43	-52	-58	-67	-74	-82	-89	-97	-105	-113	-120
M P H	40	3	-5	-13	-21	-29	-37	-45	-53	-60	-69	-76	-84	-92	-100	-107	-115	-123
	45	2	-6	-14	-22	-30	-38	-46	-54	-62	-70	-78	-85	-93	-102	-109	-117	-125

Dressing for winter weather



In dressing for cold weather, it is best to wear loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing in several layers. Outer garments should be tightly woven, water-repellent and hooded. Mittens snug at the wrist are better protection than gloves. Hats are also important to factor in—did you know 80 percent of your body heat escapes through your head?



Special winter laws



Many people are unaware that there are special rules for winter driving in Wyoming. When the state chain law is in effect, travel is restricted to four-wheel-drive vehicles and others utilizing chains or adequate snow tires on power wheels. Violating the chain law is a misdemeanor offense. State law also allows for heavy fines and jail sentences for those who ignore road closure barriers and signs.

Avoid carbon monoxide poisoning

The only significant danger of staying in your car if you become stuck is the threat of carbon monoxide poisoning. If your exhaust system is in good condition, you should be safe. Just run the engine and heater sparingly and occasionally open a “down wind” window for ventilation.

Because of drifting snow, be sure to frequently ensure your exhaust pipe is not being blocked. If you can't keep your exhaust pipe clear of drifting snow, don't run your engine, as deadly carbon monoxide will be forced into your car. Running the heater five minutes each half hour or 10 minutes each hour should be enough to keep you reasonably warm and will stretch your gas supply. Run the engine to coincide with radio news broadcasts.

Auto accessories can be helpful

If your survival kit hasn't been completed and you become stuck, remember that some automobile accessories may assist you:

- A wheel cover or sun visor can double as a shovel.
- Seat covers can be used as blankets.
- Floor mats might help your traction on ice or can be used to wrap around your clothing.
- A rearview mirror taken from the car can be an excellent signaling device whenever the sun does appear.
- Don't forget the power of your horn! The sound of a car horn honking can be heard at least one mile downwind.

A full tank of gas is also essential. Remember to always drive on the upper half of the tank to avoid running out, and fill up before going on any long trips to eliminate the possibility of becoming stranded. A little preparation beforehand can save you a few cold hours in your car later on.



Surviving in a “stuck” vehicle

1. Don't panic.
2. Stay in your car.
3. Be alert to carbon monoxide poisoning and oxygen starvation.
4. Use emergency supplies conservatively.
5. If you're stuck during the day, put an orange or red flag on your antenna. At night, leave your inside dome light on, **not** your headlights.
6. Get out and check your tailpipe occasionally to keep it clear of snow. Don't run your car if the tailpipe is covered.
7. While inside your car, occasionally open your windows and doors so they don't freeze shut.
8. If there is more than one person in the car, take turns sleeping. The person awake should periodically check those who are asleep. If you're alone, do not sleep when car is running.
9. Do some minor exercising in car to keep up circulation, but don't overdo it.
10. Once the snow has stopped, it may be possible to stamp out a big “**HELP**” signal in the snow beside your car. Don't over-exert yourself and stay as dry as possible. Just do a little at a time.
11. This may be the time you wished you had a good cell phone. Some have a range of 10-15 miles. Be careful in your use, though, and don't run down the battery. It's a good idea when traveling to watch the mile post markers alongside the highway, so if you become stranded, you can call with your exact location.
12. If you're traveling down the road in a blizzard with someone behind you and accidentally run off the road, either flash your lights or turn on your emergency flashers. Let those behind you know something is wrong and help them avoid going off the road.
13. Watch out for snowplows or other vehicles. In powdery snow, they may be hard to see.

Critical winter health tips and terms

1. **Frostbite** means there are ice crystals in the victim's skin tissue. Skin is white and has a "wooden" feel all the way through. Wrap the victim in blankets or any available clothing and give them warm, **non-alcoholic** drinks. If possible, immerse frostbitten skin in warm water and monitor the temperature. Additional warm water will need to be added. Do not rub the affected area of skin with snow.

2. **Hypothermia** is the lowering of a person's internal body temperature and can be fatal. You may be surprised to learn that most hypothermia cases develop in air temperatures between +30 and +50 degrees. This illustrates that many people under-estimate the danger of being wet at such temperatures. This is why you should always try to stay dry while attempting to dig yourself out.

Never over-exert while trying to dig or push yourself out. Hypothermia can occur within minutes after your rate of body heat production drops. An example of this may happen if you sweat while working hard, and then the wind blows across your damp clothes.

Symptoms of hypothermia: uncontrollable fits of shivering; vague, slow and slurred speech; memory lapses, incoherence; immobile, fumbling hands; frequent stumbling/lurching gait; drowsiness (sleeping at this point is fatal); and apparent exhaustion with inability to get up after a rest.

Hypothermia victims may deny they're in trouble. **Believe the symptoms**, not the patient. Even mild symptoms demand immediate, drastic treatment.

If you suspect someone is suffering from hypothermia, get the victim into shelter out of the wind, rain or snow. Remove all wet clothes and replace with dry clothes. If the victim is mildly impaired, give him/her warm drinks, and get him/her into warm clothes and a warm sleeping bag. Use woolen blankets to insulate all the way around the person, especially between the person and the ground.

Place a hat on the victim's head to prevent heat loss. If the victim is semi-conscious or worse, try to keep the victim awake—give him/her warm drinks and concentrate heat on the trunk of the body first. Keep their head low and feet up to get warm blood circulating to the head. Keep the person quiet, do not jostle, massage or rub. Never give the person alcohol, sedatives, tranquilizers or pain relievers. They only slow down body processes further.

3. **Heart Attack** can occur because a person over-exerts in digging, shoveling or pushing. Symptoms include persistent pain in the chest, neck, or jaw; gasping; paleness; unexplained nausea; and vomiting. If someone is suffering from a heart attack, get the victim into a comfortable position. Check to see if the victim has medication and, if so, administer it. If the victim has stopped breathing, give mouth to mouth resuscitation. This is why at least one member of every family should have completed a course in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). Your first aid kit manual should also describe how to perform this life-saving technique. Keep the victim at normal body temperature and get help as soon as possible.

Road condition information line

Information about road closures, advisories, construction and weather conditions in Wyoming are available by calling **1-888-WYO-ROAD** (996-7623) or visiting <http://www.wyoroad.info/index.html>. Calls from outside the state should be made to (307) 772-0824. To report emergencies, accidents or drunken drivers, dial **1-800-442-9090**.

FM radio stations in Wyoming

Tune to the following radio stations for information on road conditions, weather advisories and other local information:

Afton: 98.7, KRSV

Albin: 107.3 KKAW

Buffalo: 90.5 KBUW; 92.9, KLGT

Burns: 101.9 KIGN

Casper: 106.9 KASS; 102.5 KHOC;
96.7 KMGW; 94.5 KMLD; 104.7 KTRS;
91.3 KUWC; 95.5 KWYY

Cheyenne: 99.9 KKPL; 106.3 KLEN;
100.7 KOLZ; 97.9 KQLF; 104.9 KRRR;
101.9 KIGN

Cody: 97.9 KTAG,

Douglas: 91.7 KDUW; 105.1 KFCB;
99.3 KKTY

Evanston: 106.1 KOTB

Gillette: 96.9 KAML; 89.7 KAXG;
99.1 KCOV; 100.7 KGWY; 91.9 KLWD;
90.9 KUWG; 88.9 KYPR

Green River: 92.1 KFRZ

Greybull: 100.3 KZMQ

Jackson: 93.3 KJAX; 97.7 KJHB;
96.9 KMTN; 90.3 KUWJ; 95.3 KZJH

Kemmerer: 107.3 KAOX

Lander: 97.5 KDLY; 95.3 KTRZ

Laramie: 95.1 KCGY; 96.7 KHAT;
105.5 KIMX; 93.5 KOCA; 91.9
KUWR

Newcastle: 99.5 KRKI; 90.5 KUWN;

Pinedale: 101.1 KPIN; 90.9 KUWX

Powell: 104.1 KCGL

Rawlins: 92.7 KIQZ

Riverton: 88.1 KCWC; 93.9 KTAK;
93.1 KTRZ

Rock Springs: 96.5 KQSW;
104.5 KSIT; 90.5 KUWZ; 95.1 KYCS

Sheridan: 91.3 KSUW; 93.7 KYTI;
94.9 KZWY

Torrington: 98.3 KERM

Thermopolis: 101.7 KDNO

Wheatland: 101.7 KZEW

Worland: 96.1 KKLX

AM STATIONS IN WYOMING

Afton	KRSV-1210
Buffalo	KBBS-1450
Casper	KTWO-1030
	KUYO-830
	KVOC-1230
Cheyenne	KFBC-1240
	KJL-1370
	KRAE-1480
	KGAB-650
	KKWY-1630
Cody	KODI-1400
Douglas	KKTY-1470
Evanston	KEVA-1240
Gillette	KIML-1270
Green River	KUGR-1490
Greybull	KZMQ-1140
Jackson	KSGT-1340
Kemmerer	KMER-950
Lander	KOVE-1330 L
aramie	KLDI-1210
	KOWB-1290
Newcastle	KASL-1240
Powell	KPOW-1260
Rawlins	KRAL-1240
Riverton	KVOW-1450
Rock Sprgs.	KRKK-1360
Sheridan	KROE-930
	KWYO-1410
Thermopolis	KTHE-1240
Torrington	KGOS-1490

Wheatland	KYCN-1340
Worland	KWOR-1340

AM STATIONS IN NEIGHBORING STATES

Billings, MT	KGHL-790
Denver, CO	KOA-850
Salt Lake City, UT	KSL-1160
Scottsbluff, NE	KNEB-960

Wyoming NOAA Weather Stations

Cheyenne/	
Laramie	162.550
Casper	162.400
Evanston	162.450
Rawlins	162.425
Rock Springs	162.550
Sheridan	162.475
Riverton	162.475

Regional NOAA Weather Stations

Chadron	162.525
Denver	162.550
Ft. Collins	162.450
Great Falls	162.550
Greeley	162.400

Winter problems

Once in awhile, you may find your car locks are frozen. Warming your key with a match or lighter may thaw your lock. Covering your locks with a piece of tape may help prevent future occurrences.

If the weather is extremely cold, engine block heaters, heated dip sticks or units that heat and circulate your water are terrific aids in starting your car. They don't use much electricity and they save wear and tear on the car and your disposition. Even leaving a trouble light under the hood near your battery to keep the frost off will help a lot in getting you going in the morning.

If your car won't start but is turning over or cranking, your gas line may be frozen. Add gas line de-icer according to your owner's manual and instructions on the label before you add fuel.

If your car's battery is dead or just not cranking enough to start your engine, you may need a jump. However, if your battery was completely dead and the fluid frozen, it could be ruined. If you do attempt a jump, make sure the two vehicles are not touching, then attach the jumper cables in the proper order as explained in the owner's manual.

Don't invite trouble

Some publications recommend motorists raise their hood and tie a colored cloth to it to signal that the occupants are having car trouble. This may be OK in the summer but is not recommended in the winter due to the possibility of snow drifting into the engine compartment.

Snow can even drift in on the engine compartment through the grill when the hood is closed if the wind currents are just right. Melting snow in the engine compartment may short out the spark plugs and cause other problems once you get your engine started and warmed up. Lifting the hood compounds the problem.



IV. SUMMARY

We realize that not all winter accidents or emergencies are preventable. Sometimes you can be doing everything right yourself, but due to another driver's error, a collision or emergency situation may occur. However, if you follow the guidelines in this book, your chances of making it through the winter without a major crash or emergency will be greatly improved. The main thing to remember is to make preparations ahead of time, including:

- **Winterizing your vehicle.**
- **Keeping a winter survival kit in each of your vehicles.**
- **Staying in your car if you become stranded.**
- **Driving defensively.**
- **Knowing where to go for information.**

By following winter driving tips in this book, using common sense and planning properly, you can enjoy a trouble-free Wyoming winter. The time to prepare is now, not when you're stuck in the middle of nowhere without a friend in sight. Don't procrastinate; prepare **NOW** and have a safe winter.



**Wyoming Office of Homeland Security
122 W. 25th Street
Herschler Building, First Floor East
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-HOME**

The information in this booklet represents the most current information at its publication date. However, research and studies into winter survival, hypothermia and injuries due to cold are ongoing. This information may not represent the most current information in this dynamic area of study. The Wyoming Office of Homeland Security and the state of Wyoming assume no liability for your use or reliance upon any of the information contained in this booklet.