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Winter Car Emergency Guide Tips for Driver Safety

Family Circle Articles

“Winter Car Emergency Guide”

By Al Ubell and Label Shulman

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To help you cope with the worst that Jack Frost may blow your way, we've prepared this special guide on how to safely handle the most common cold-weather road emergencies. Keep it tucked in your sun visor or glove compartment as an up-front reminder on how to deal with dead batteries, skids and more.



Winter Survival Tips

- [Stuck On Snow Or Ice](#)
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The Emergency: STUCK ON SNOW OR ICE How To Get Unstuck

- Always start out slowly if stuck on a slippery, icy surface. Often, the idling speed of the motor will be enough to get you going. Do not accelerate sharply or let your wheels spin, since this will only compound the problem and dig you in deeper.
- If the snow is very deep, use a shovel to remove as much snow as possible from in front and back of all wheels first. Then clear as much snow as possible from underneath the car as well. Next, spread some sand, salt or ashes in front and back of the rear wheels (the front wheels, if your car is front-wheel drive). If you have traction mats, that's even better. Start accelerating slowly, keeping front wheels pointed straight ahead to lessen resistance, until the car is moving freely.
- If all else fails! Try a rocking maneuver with your car.
 - (1) Shift car into reverse, until you feel the engine begin to pull.
 - (2) Shift car into drive (if you have an automatic transmission) or into second gear (if you have a manual transmission).
 - (3) Alternately and smoothly, repeat this procedure until you feel car moving forward (or backward, if that is the direction you wish to go).

Preventive Measures

Equip your car with snow tires; they give better traction.

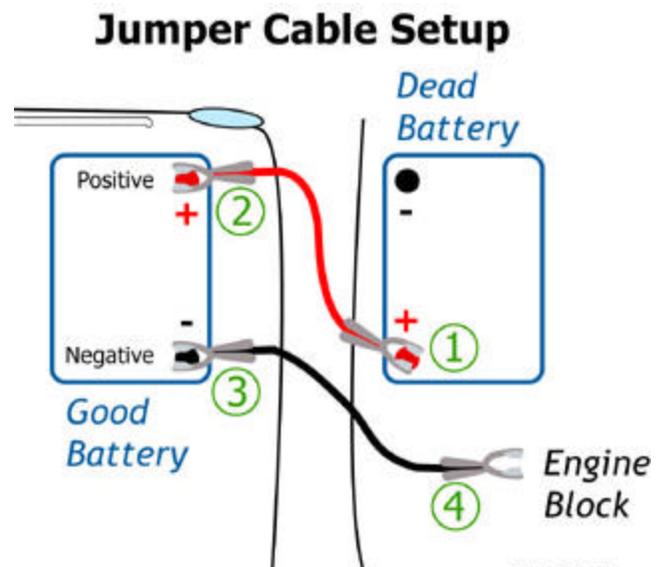
Keep quick-chains in your trunk. These give the best traction on icy, snowy roads. Place the quick-chains on drive wheels, either front or rear, depending on your car. *CAUTION:* Don't let anyone stand behind your car; they could be seriously injured.

The Emergency: DEAD CAR BATTERY

How To Jump Start Your Car *

*Check your car owner's manual for complete details on jump-starting, your car.

1. Remember, connect only batteries of similar voltage! 12 volt to 12 volt, 6 volt to 6 volt. Check owner's manual (or examine the battery) to determine voltage.
2. Get the good and the "dead" batteries as close together as possible by maneuvering the working car. But do not allow the bumpers to touch!
3. Safety precaution: Cover vent openings of both the good and "dead" batteries with rags to prevent possible battery-acid splatter.
4. Place both cars in Park position with emergency brakes on. Unravel the jumper cables, making sure that the clamps on either end never touch each other.
5. **(1)** Connect one red-end clamp to the positive (+) battery post of the "dead" battery. **NOTE:** Batteries are designed differently; some have the posts on top; some have them on the side. All posts have markings on or next to the post indicating positive (+) or negative (-).
6. **(2)** Connect the other red -clamp to the positive (+) post of the good battery.
7. **(3)** Connect one black-end clamp to the negative (-) post of the good battery.
8. **(4)** Carefully connect the other black-end clamp to some large metallic part of your car's engine block (see illustration). Never connect it to the negative (-) post of your car. This prevents sparking close to the battery, which could ignite battery gases. Take special care to keep the jumper cables away from the fan belt or other moving parts of the engine.
9. Now, you're ready to jump -start your car. Start the working car and run it at idling speed. Then start your car.
10. Once your car has started and is running, immediately disconnect the jumper cables in this order: **(4)** black-end clamp on your car's engine block, **(3)** black-end clamp on good car, **(2)** red-end clamp on good car, **(1)** red-end clamp on your car.



Remember to have your car battery checked by an auto mechanic.

NOTE: It's always a good idea to check the liquid level in your battery because this may be why your battery won't start your car. Begin by removing vent caps from battery to check liquid levels. If liquid is low, add water. However, if liquid appears frozen, do not attempt to jump-start. The battery could explode. Do not attempt to open permanently sealed batteries.

CAUTION: Lead-acid batteries contain sulfuric acid. If you're accidentally splattered by some battery liquid, wash affected parts with lots of clean water for about 15 minutes. Call your physician, or go to local hospital emergency room immediately. **WARNING:** Never smoke or light match near your car battery.

The Emergency: CAR GOES INTO A SKID

The Solution: HOW TO STEER OUT SAFELY

1. Do not jam on the brakes, and try not to panic. Instead, ease up on the accelerator.
2. Remember, don't oversteer, but do steer the car in the direction in which the rear of the car is skidding. This means: If the rear of the automobile is skidding toward the left, turn the steering wheel slowly and smoothly to the left. If the skid is toward the right, turn the steering wheel to the right.
3. Sometimes the car will come back too fast and begin to skid the other way. Be ready to turn your wheel in the other direction to straighten out once more.
4. When you have regained steering control, you may then be able to begin braking by tapping the brake pedal in a light, pumping motion.
5. *FOR FRONT-WHEEL-DRIVE CARS:* If you find yourself going into a skid, first step down lightly on the gas pedal and steer out of the skid in the direction you want the car to go. Sudden braking or slowing of the wheels can turn a skid into a spin-out. If the road is too narrow to maneuver, shift the engine into neutral gear and continue to steer out of the skid.

Pre-Winter Car Inspection Checklist

GET YOUR CAR READY FOR WINTER

- Check your battery water levels.
- Check battery wires for corrosion or cracking.
- Clean battery posts and terminals by using a stiff brush and a paste of baking soda and water.
- Tighten battery terminal connections.
- Spray waterproofing solution on exposed ignition wires.
- Tune up engine: Check (or have your mechanic check) the spark plugs, ignition timing, distributor cap and points, carburetor, gas and air filters.
- Check all engine belts for signs of tension and wear. Replace worn or cracked belts.
- Change oil and replace oil filter.
- Check radiator and hoses for leaks or deterioration, and have them repaired or replaced.
- Check antifreeze in your radiator. If it is the permanent type: Check its strength to make sure it's adequate to handle the coldest temperatures in your area; add more of the same type, if necessary. For non-permanent antifreeze: Drain and flush the radiator and add new antifreeze.
- Test your heater and defroster to make sure they work!
- Test and adjust your brakes and the brake-fluid level. Don't forget to check the emergency brake!

- Check the windshield wipers and the condition of the blades. *HINT:* Before discarding wiper blades, clean them first with scouring powder and then rinse thoroughly. This may be all that's needed to restore them.
- Keep windshield washer reservoir filled with an antifreeze washer solution.
- Mount snow tires before the usual first snow in your area. *Remember:* On front-wheel-drive cars, place snow tires on the front wheels.
- Check tires for proper air pressure. Under inflated tires do not provide better traction in snow or on ice.

Car Emergency Kit: MAKE-IT-YOURSELF

Every driver will at some time be faced with an automobile emergency or dangerous driving conditions. Make sure your car is equipped with the following items, which make up this basic emergency kit.

In the glove compartment:

- Name, address & phone number of someone to call in an emergency. Tape this to inside of compartment door.
- A set of spare fuses for your electrical system. (Practice removing and replacing these fuses.)
- Flashlight in working condition (keep a set of extra batteries in a sealed plastic bag).
- Pocket knife.
- Aspirins and extra, necessary medications for usual occupants of car.

In the trunk:

- Spare tire (check it regularly to maintain full inflation).
- Fire extinguisher-the dry chemical type. (Learn to use it!)
- First-aid kit with first-aid manual.
- A tire jack and lug wrenches for changing tires.
- Tire blocks -to prevent car from rolling down a hill or from moving when changing a tire.
- Flares or reflectors for emergency warnings to other drivers. (Read instructions on how to use them.)
- An empty can to carry gasoline (if you run out of gas) or water (if your engine boils over and you lose your coolant). But never carry gasoline in a can in your trunk. In case of an accident, that can of gasoline is like having dynamite in your car.

Special winter emergency items:

- Ice scraper and snow brush. (Keep two; they break easily.)
- Tire quick-chains in case you get stuck in deep snow or on ice.
- Traction mats for getting out of slippery locations.
- Small bag of dry sand-to throw under wheels to give you better traction.
- Small metal shovel to dig out of deep snow.

If you're snowbound in your car, you'll appreciate:

- Candles, or several containers of canned heat.
- Matches.
- Two coffee cans with plastic lids -one for melting snow to make drinking water; one to place candles or canned heat in.
- Finally, tape \$1 in dimes inside your glove compartment for emergency use in isolated phone booths.

What to do if you're snowbound!

First, and most important, don't panic! Stay with your car; it's your safest shelter. Then follow these steps:

- Remove your emergency supplies from your trunk and bring them into the car.
- Clear the exhaust pipe at the rear of the car (using the shovel). A clogged exhaust system can be fatal.
- Open the car window slightly for ventilation. An airtight car can be dangerous.
- Light a flare and place it outside your car, so you can be seen more easily.
- Run engine and heater for only 10 minutes each hour, to conserve gasoline just in case you're stuck for a long time. You'll stay warm enough, especially if you have on extra clothing.
- If you're low on gas-or out of gas-light a candle or can of canned heat in the coffee can. It will provide enough heat to keep you from freezing.
- *DON'T LEAVE YOUR CAR* unless you know that there is a shelter nearby. You can easily get lost in a snowstorm and freeze.
- Listen to your radio periodically for weather conditions and emergency bulletins.

Resources

<http://www.dot.gov/>

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>

<http://www.aaa.com/>

For additional information, contact the U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Safety Administration, Washington, D.C. 20590 or the nearest Automobile Association of America (AM) or other automobile.



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