

Beat the rush: winterize your vehicle now for cold weather to come

Make sure systems are in proper running order and stock the trunk with handy, dandy emergency items

I didn't think I'd be writing this column. At least, not writing it this month. Then again, I didn't think I'd be putting up holiday lights either, but as I watched my neighbours stringing lights around their necks and scaling ladders like lemurs, I thought I'd better do a little investigation.

So I asked why they were busy sacrificing their back muscles just to hang icicle lights when we had a least a month or so before winter hit.

Some of them actually laughed right out loud. I took the hint.

If winter is not in the distant future like I so naively thought, then it's not too early to write this column after all. So, plan your Saturday afternoon so you have a little time after you've put your ladder away to winterize your vehicle.

Whether you're a city or a rural driver, the checklist is the same. Make an appointment with your mechanic and have them make sure the following



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are all in good working order:

Checklist

- ignition system
- battery and lights
- fuel and cooling systems
- heater and exhaust systems
- brakes
- wipers and defroster
- antifreeze, oil (winter grade) and other lubricants

Checking the heater and exhaust systems is extremely important. If they're not sound, toxic carbon monoxide could seep into your vehicle, and odds are pretty good you're not going to have a window open to clear it out.

Make sure your windshield washer reservoir is filled with an antifreeze washer fluid, and consider investing in a heavy-duty set of wiper blades. You might not think this important now, but imagine this: A big truck blasts by you, dumping a spray of mucky snow on your windshield. You turn on your worn-down summer wipers, and watch helplessly as they create a nice mud-pie smear across your windshield. You hit another button to squirt out some washer fluid (which is water, since you didn't change it), and freeze your mud-pie solid. Not fun. Not safe, either.

OK, moving on, you then want to look at your tires. All season or snow, that is the question. And, there's no pat answer. It all depends on where you go. Snow tires are a terrific advantage on snow-covered roads. But, if you drive mostly where roads are generally wet, not snowy, a good set of all season radials will usually perform better. Whichever you choose, don't

mix tires: put the same kind on all four wheels. If you're not replacing your tires, have an expert check the tread, and make sure they're properly inflated.

Seasonal travel kit

Now that your car is winterized, consider winterizing your trunk with a seasonal travel kit. It's time to take out the cooler, the folding chair and the beach blanket. The replacement paraphernalia is less fun, but more important should you find yourself stuck in a sudden storm.

Even if most of your winter driving occurs between home and the grocery store, you should have the following at hand:

- extension cord
- kitty litter for traction
- small snow shovel
- jumper cables
- ice scraper and snow brush
- extra gloves
- flashlight

- spare tire (inflated, please!)
- first aid kit
- extra washer fluid and paper towels

If you drive in more isolated conditions, you should also carry extra clothing, blankets, matches, a candle in a deep can, an axe and an emergency food pack. Use your discretion; if you like to snowmobile in the middle of God's country, and it takes you three hours and a compass to get there, then you should have a tow cable, flares and a fire extinguisher, too.

We'll be talking more about winter driving safety as the temperature drops and the snow banks rise. In the meantime, be **RoadWise**.

Paul Allen is Road Safety Manager for Manitoba Public Insurance. He would like to hear from you. His e-mail address is pallen@mpi.mb.ca and his mailing address is Room 824, 234 Donald Street, Box 6300, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4A4.