

DID YOU KNOW???

DON'T BLAME HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT FOR SLIPPERY ROADS

Did you just skid off the road and into the ditch? Or, worse yet, skid into a signpost, tree, utility pole, or some other object? Did you ever skid through a stop sign or a red light at an intersection? Most drivers, at some point in their years of driving in winter conditions, do lose control of their vehicle – if they're lucky, no one is killed, injured, and there is little or no damage to their vehicle. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work that way.

No one (well, almost no one) intentionally loses control of their vehicle on slippery roads – we all *think* we have full control at all times, until we lose it. Assuming there is no one hurt, the next thing most drivers do is blame the highway department for not having the roads fully plowed, salted, sanded, so we can drive on our merrily way at full speed ahead.

Instead of that, why not blame yourself for driving too fast for the conditions at the time! Interestingly, a direct quote from the loss control department of Utica National Insurance states: “Snow and ice NEVER CAUSED an accident (that last word should be crash) – it may be a contributing factor, but it never caused it.” I like that quote and use it frequently in my driver safety presentations.

Driving conditions in winter can vary from minute to minute, from mile to mile, and from shade to sun. There's no one way to drive safely at all times under all conditions – this trait must be learned over time, and sometimes even the best drivers do something wrong, never mind the rookie driver. The point in this and the preceding paragraph is that the blame MUST be placed on the driver, not the highway department.

Every municipality (village, town, county, and state) has a highway department with equipment capable of clearing snow from their streets and roads and applying ice and snow control chemicals (rock salt, calcium and magnesium chlorides), and abrasives (sand, ore tailings etc.). They also generally have more than one shift, and if they don't have enough personnel for that, they utilize overtime to get streets and roads in as best possible shape in as quick a time as they can do so.

Unfortunately, it just doesn't snow between midnight and 2:00 a.m. to give highway crews time to get the roads in shape for your morning commute. Just like “any time is train time”, any time is also snow, sleet, or freezing rain time. During a weather event, crews work hard to at least keep the snow on the roads to a minimum and provide enough traction to drive at a slower-than-normal speed. After the event is over, many more hours of work are required to clear the packed snow and ice. All this takes time.

So, cut the highway crews a little slack – they are doing the best job they can under very difficult and trying conditions. But they can't work miracles – you must do your part and drive prudently. Remember, they are out there day and night working for you at the expense of their normal routine. It's now time to appreciate them, not criticize them for your mistakes.

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