

Driving in the Rain: Safety on California Roads

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Coming into autumn, this seems like a perfect time to revisit how driving in the rain is different than driving on a dry road. That first big rain of the season can stir up a lot of debris on the road creating mud and oil patches that are especially slippery. Be aware of that fact and account for the debris after the first big downpour and every storm after a dry spell.

Rain affects three main aspects of driving: 1) ability to see, 2) ability to stop, and 2) maintaining control of your vehicle. Your ability to see is compromised when the rain hits your windshield and because the clouds block most of the sunlight. Please remember to turn your lights on. In California it is now against the law to run your windshield wipers without your headlights on. Also, remember to take off the sunglasses, they are not needed with the cloud cover.

The wet roads are a slick surface under your wheels. Without as much traction, you need more time to stop your vehicle; this means you need a greater following distance. It's risky enough tailgating on a dry road, don't do it when it rains. You also might need to push harder on your breaks. I know that I can't lift my foot slightly to prevent a sharp stop in the rain like I do when it's dry.

Wind often accompanies rain in a storm. Wind, slick roads, and inability to see lines can create confusion on the road. Sharp turns or big puddles can easily turn into hydroplaning. Hydroplaning is when the tires of a vehicle completely lose traction on the road and skid like a sled. Preventing hydroplaning is usually as simple as slowing down. Tread on tires is

designed to wick away water, but if the tire is moving too quickly it cannot perform this task. So, slow down. Also make sure your tires are properly inflated and check for tread wear.

If the worst should happen and you find yourself hydroplaning, do not turn the wheel sharply or slam on the brakes. Just let up on the gas and gently turn your wheel to guide toward the shoulder of the roadway, that way, if you do continue to skid, it is not in the direction of oncoming traffic. Bridges can be dangerous spots because water will tend to pool somewhere. Be aware of your surroundings and try to avoid large puddles, they could be deeper than they look.

Slow down, increase following distance, turn your lights on. Your actions this fall affect your family, your fellow drivers, and yourself. For more tips on driving in the rain, SmartMotorist.com is a good resource. Be safe out there this season.

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