

## **DEFENSIVE DRIVING BASICS DRIVING IN THE RAIN**

It's no surprise that the accident rate always goes up during the rain. Because wet roads are slippery roads, it pays to slow down and increase your following distance by one or two seconds, as soon as it starts to rain.

### **A Light Rain Is All It Takes**

Most people assume that the wetter a road is, the more dangerous it is. But in fact, roads are often at their slipperiest just at the beginning of the first storm after a long dry spell. This is because the rain hasn't yet washed the road free of accumulated grease. Summer rains can be even worse because the road grease is warm and rises to the surface of the water easily.

### **Puddles Can Hide Hazards**

Avoid driving through puddles or flooded roads. Water on the road can hide dangerous debris or potholes. It can also flood your brakes so that they don't work just when you need them the most. If your brakes do get wet, dry them out by driving while holding the brake pedal down—just until the brakes begin to work again.

When there is water on the road, check the road ahead and behind frequently for large vehicles that can send a blinding spray of water across your windshield. If you get caught in such a spray, remember these steps:

- Grip the wheel firmly.
- Stay off the brake.
- Be ready to brake when the view clears.

### **Hydroplaning**

When cars travel at high speeds—50 mph or more—on wet and/or oily roads, the tires are not in full contact with the road. They are riding on a layer of water and/or oil. Because there is no contact with the road, it's impossible to brake or steer. Hydroplaning most often happens in a light mist or drizzle.

You can tell your car is hydroplaning when you notice a decrease in steering or braking ability, or the absence of the sound of your tires against the road. To prevent hydroplaning:

- Slow down to less than 50 mph as soon as it starts to rain.
- Keep tires properly inflated. Replace tires with worn tread.
- Drive in the tracks of the vehicle ahead of you.

If you start to hydroplane, treat it like a skid. Don't hit the brakes. Slow down immediately by easing your foot off the accelerator. Avoid sudden turns that could cause you to skid.

### **Visibility Is Important**

With rain pounding on your windshield and the road around you, you need all the visibility you can get. Use your defroster as well as your wipers to keep your windows as clear as possible. The time to replace your wiper blades, incidentally, is before the rainy season starts. To keep the blades in good shape, wash them when you wash your windshield. Turn on your low-beam headlights to make yourself more visible to other drivers whenever you use your wipers.

Treat the rain like most traffic hazards: slow down, increase your following distance and pay attention.