

WINTER SAFETY ITEMS FOR YOUR CAR

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Let's face it, here in our Interior Alaska winters, unforeseen vehicle breakdowns do occur and that can result in serious injury or death. Being prepared can help keep you and your family safe if such an event happens. Sadly, a whole lot of folks are totally unprepared. So, let's go over a cold weather check list of things you should carry in your vehicle.

Always have a fully inflated spare tire on a wheel that fits your car (you'd be surprised how many times we find that folks are carrying a spare on a wheel that doesn't fit), an operating jack, and a lug wrench on board. If you don't know how to use the jack and lug wrench, your owner's manual will show you where these items are stored and how to use them. Check to make sure they are still there.

Next, if you have a cell phone, always carry it with you in the car along with a 12 volt charger. I can recall many times that folks (including my own family) got help quickly simply because they had an operating cell phone with them. And I also recall instances where an operating cell phone on board would have prevented injury or saved lives.

Warm jackets, gloves, boots and hats are a must in winter – even for short trips. For road trips, I insist that our family carry complete snow machine gear. We've never had to use those suits but it's nice to know they're on board if needed. And, I also recommend that you carry one reasonably warm sleeping bag or wool blanket per person on board. In an emergency, remember to bundle up the little ones first since they lose heat faster and regain it slower than a larger person.

Next, I recommend you carry a good set of jumper cables (at least 12 feet long), a spare fan belt with the proper tool you need to replace it, and a good basic tool kit. The tool kit should include several pliers, an adjustable wrench, a couple sizes of screwdrivers and a box to keep them in. A good automotive supply store can help you put together a good, well packaged kit.

Next, be sure to keep a small flashlight and batteries in the glove box and a larger one with spare batteries in the trunk. Then get three or four road flares and keep them in your trunk in a fireproof container. And, while you're at it, pick up a set of triangular tilt-up reflectors and a small selection of appropriate fuses. Again, an automotive supply store can help you get all the right items.

Then, don't forget to carry a good first aid kit that includes basic care items for a lot of different injuries and a manual demonstrating how to use them. Prices will vary depending on how comprehensive you want your kit to be. You can get a good kit for \$50 or less at many local retailers or pharmacies.

Finally, I recommend you always have a roll or two of duct tape, a small rope, two or three bungee cords and a couple tubes of Super Glue as part of your survival gear. You need things that hold other things together.

Finally, always keep your fuel tank at least a half full in the winter. Extended idling while you wait for help can consume a lot of gas and you want it there when you need it.

A little common sense goes a long way. Keep calm in all situations and don't do anything rash. Let people know where you are going before you leave and when to expect you back or to make contact. Then, if you have a problem, stay with your vehicle if at all possible and try to make contact with emergency services. Good luck and safe driving this winter.