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FALL DRIVING TIPS

Autumn leaves drift by the window and right into the street. Driving in the fall presents its own colorful set of problems. Decreasing daylight and wet leaves create challenges for the unsuspecting driver. The Minnesota Safety Council offers these tips to help you navigate fall driving hazards.



§ Patches of fallen leaves can be just as treacherous as patches of ice. Fallen leaves retain large amounts of water and can create a slippery surface. Drive slowly through them and avoid hard or panic braking.

§ Fall brings the first frost. Be aware of slippery conditions that occur with frost. At freezing or near freezing temperatures, the moisture on bridges and overpasses will become ice much more quickly than the approach roadway. The roadways hold heat and the bridges do not; you can go from wet roadway to ice in just a fraction of a second.

§ School buses are as common in the fall as dandelions in the spring. Be particularly careful around them. Your responsibility in the presence of a bus with an extended stop arm and flashing red lights is to stop and remain stopped until the warnings are withdrawn, regardless of your direction of travel. The only time a driver is not required to stop when approaching the front of the school bus is if the bus and the vehicle are on separated roadways.

§ Frost, sunshine, wet leaves on the road, school buses, and kids horsing around on the way to school can be a disaster if they come together at the wrong time. Please recognize the hazard and drive accordingly.

§ Fall weather can present challenges to drivers. Rain, fog, sleet and wet snow require full driver attention. Remember the "two-second rule" when following other drivers, and in severe weather increase your following distance. If you are being tailgated, let the other driver pass.

§ As you know, the sun rises later and sets earlier as fall approaches. Your commute to and from work may find you driving directly into the sun. Fall driving in Minnesota can be beautiful but glare can also make it dangerous. Be sure your windows are clean, inside and out, and have sunglasses handy. When you lower your visor, push it all the way forward, then pull it back to the proper position don't leave the edge of the visor inches from the bridge of your nose where it could cause injury in a crash. If you're driving away from a low sun, glare will not be a problem for you, but it can be for the drivers approaching from the other direction. It may help to use your low beam headlights, allowing you to be seen more readily.

§ The decreasing daylight may also mean that some drivers will be commuting in twilight or dark conditions. A driver's vision, including depth perception, color

recognition and peripheral vision, is compromised in darkened conditions. Diminished visual ability, brought about by the natural aging process, leaves the older driver more vulnerable to night driving hazards. The human body becomes more relaxed and less alert in the dark, becoming more easily lulled and drowsy. However, there are ways to minimize the hazards associated with driving in the dark:

- Prepare your eyes for night driving. When you step out of a brightly lit building into a darkened environment it takes anywhere between two and five minutes for your eyes to begin adjusting to the change in light conditions and it takes a full 30 minutes to fully adjust. Allow your eyes that little extra time to adjust before driving into the dark.

- Make sure your headlights, tail lights and turn signals are all working properly. Turn your headlights on as soon as the light begins to fade. Always use low beams when traveling in foggy conditions the light of your high beams will simply be reflected off the moisture in the air right back at you.

- Check the aim of your headlights. Badly aimed headlights reduce the distance you can see and possibly blind oncoming drivers. If you think your headlights are not aimed properly have them adjusted. You can adjust them yourself by checking them against a blank, flat surface while parked on a level driveway, or take them to a professional.

Common sense along with the basics of safe driving (always wearing a safety belt, driving alert and sober, and driving at safe and legal speeds) can help you travel safely in the fall.

Acknowledgments:

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