

## Advice for Driving in Severe Tropical Weather

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If a hurricane or tropical storm is approaching your area, be prepared. Even if your area isn't affected directly by a major storm, there may be significant amounts of rain and/or wind. Since flooding can occur without warning before or after a hurricane or tropical storm, you should avoid driving on coastal and low-lying areas and keep a close eye out for water on roadways.

### Water Crossings

What is a water crossing?

- A water crossing is any area where water is crossing or standing in the road. It may be where the road dips as it crosses a normally dry creek bed or drainage area.

Things to remember:

- More people lose their lives in floods than any other weather related event. (National Weather Service)
- Drowning while attempting to cross in flooded areas account for nearly half of all flood related deaths. (National Weather Service)
- Damage from floods exceeds \$3 billion annually.

Few people realize the power of running water.

- Drivers are overconfident because of the size and weight of their vehicle.
- Water weighs 62.4 pounds per cubic foot. That is the equivalent of two cinder blocks hitting you at your knees at ten miles per hour.
- The force against your car is about 500 pounds for each foot of water.
- Your car is buoyant. It will tend to float and rise up as the water rises. The water will lift your wheels away from the pavement and cause you to lose control of your vehicle, which may also stall.
- You can lose all control of your vehicle in as little as 6 inches of running or rushing water.

Why do drivers enter these areas?

- Drivers don't recognize the danger associated with fast moving water.
- Drivers do not realize that just a few inches difference in the depth of water can dramatically change the risk involved.
- Drivers may have driven in similar situations without experiencing a problem.
- Highway dips that can be potentially dangerous crossings may or may not be marked.
- Drivers do not realize the force against the car is about 500 pounds for each foot of rushing water.

- Drivers do not realize the car is buoyant. It will tend to float and rise up as the water rises. This will lift the wheels away from the pavement and control of the vehicle is lost.

What should drivers do?

- Heed all flood and flash flood warnings issued by the National Weather Service.
- Do not drive around barricades at water crossings.
- Be especially vigilant at night. Many drowning deaths occur at night when it is difficult to see low water crossings and to judge the dangers.
- Do not cross or enter flowing water.
- Driving fast is not a solution. Faster speed creates less contact with the road and the vehicle will lose contact with the pavement sooner.
- If you choose to abandon your vehicle respect the force of the water flow -- you may be swept off your feet.
- Be aware that road erosion may occur when there is running or standing water.
- Be aware that standing or fast moving water may affect your brakes. Test your brakes at low speeds as soon as you exit the water.
- Don't take chances with hidden dangers at water crossings.

### Severe Tropical Weather Driving

It is not a good idea to drive during a hurricane or tropical storm. The winds are high and unpredictable and hurricanes often spawn tornados. Visibility can be impossible and other special hazards exist. If you must drive when the weather is extreme as a result of a hurricane or if you must drive immediately after the event here are a few things to keep in mind.

#### Be Prepared

- During and after a major storm the electricity that runs gas pumps may not be functioning. Make sure you have a full tank of gas.
- Check your tires for proper air pressure, all fluids including the windshield washer fluid reservoir and check and replace if needed your windshield wiper blades.

#### Wind

- High winds can make controlling your vehicle very difficult.
- The winds could buffet your vehicle to the side and/or cause sudden changes on direction.
- Keep both hands on the steering wheel.
- Be ready for sudden wind sheer.
- Make modest corrections to steering.
- Do not drive fast.

#### Visibility

- The rain associated with hurricanes and tropical storms will reduce visibly.
- Drive at a speed that will allow you time to manage visibility, time and space.

- Check your windshield wipers before the storm to make sure your blades are in good condition.
- During and after the storm the road may be very difficult to see. The leaves from trees will likely be stripped and covering the road and shoulders.
- Remember the storm will place objects in the road that may not normally be there.
- Be aware of debris, limbs and trees, broken glass and downed power lines.

Stay put.

- Keep your driving to a minimum during and after a storm.
- The downed power lines and trees make passage difficult.
- After a storm the risk of falling objects such as limbs is still real.
- Emergency vehicles need more space to operate and you need to give them the room.
- Utility companies need to be able to get to the areas where downed and broken lines are a health risk.
- Emergency providers need to be able to concentrate on helping those who are in need.
- Do not become an additional problem for them by getting on the road too soon.