

Highways Safety Briefing – Driving in Heavy Rain and Floods

Driving in heavy rain and flooding can be hazardous.

If you must drive, there are steps you can take to reduce your chances of an accident or breakdown in wet weather.



Preparing for driving in heavy rain

As with all journeys, consider before you set off whether your journey is essential. If not, can it be delayed until after the rain has subsided? If it has to go ahead, plan your journey in advance, taking care to avoid areas which are prone to flooding, and factor in extra time to allow for slower speeds and potential congestion. It is also a good idea to let someone know your intended route and expected time of arrival.

Use the Vehicle Checklist on the telent Mobile App to confirm you and your vehicle are ready for the journey – do your POWDERY check.

Before you go:

- Check that your windscreen wiper blades are fully functional. If not, have them replaced.
- Fill up with fuel before you travel, as getting stuck in traffic will increase your fuel consumption. Remember, with the lights, heater and wipers switched on, your fuel economy will be reduced even further
- Listen out for local news bulletins to keep up to date with road closures, flooding and forecasts
- Carry a fully charged mobile phone in case you encounter any difficulties during your journey
- Check that your tyres have **legal tyre tread depth** so you can be sure you have a safe amount of grip on the roads.

How to drive in heavy rain

1. **Slow down.** Reduce your speed and leave more space between you and the vehicle in front as **stopping distances in rain** are increased
2. **Use dipped headlights** so that other drivers can see you more easily
3. **Don't use rear fog lights.** They can mask your brake lights and dazzle drivers behind you
4. **Look out for large or fast-moving vehicles** creating spray which reduces visibility
5. **Keep your air conditioning on**, as this will stop your windows from misting up
6. **Listen out for local news bulletins** to keep up to date with road closures, flooding and forecasts
7. If you break down in torrential rain **keep the bonnet closed** while waiting for help to arrive, to avoid the electrical system getting soaked
8. Driving too fast through standing water could lead to tyres losing contact with the road. If your steering suddenly feels light you could be aquaplaning. To regain grip, **ease off the accelerator, do not brake and allow your speed to reduce** until you gain full control of the steering again
9. **Be considerate** to other road users and try not to spray pedestrians and cyclists as you drive through water

Stopping distances in the rain

The Highway Code states that stopping distances will be at least double in wet weather, because your tyres will have less grip on the road. Reduce your speed and leave more space between you and the vehicle in front to account for greater stopping distances.

Remember the two-second rule? Well, increase it to four if it begins to pour!

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How to drive through water and floods

Heavy rain may lead to large puddles, areas of standing water and even flooding. The best advice is to not drive through standing water and to find another way to your destination.

**When driving a standard car, the MAXIMUM depth most experts advise you drive through is just 10cm.
Modern cars are generally water-tight and can start to float when driven through water that is only 30cm deep.**

NEVER drive through water where you can not be certain that it is shallow enough and with no obstructions to safely drive through.

NEVER attempt to drive through fast flowing water – you could easily get swept away.

If you have no other alternative than to drive through standing water or puddles, the RAC have put together some top tips for driving through them:

- Size up the water first – even if it means you have to stop your car and get out (getting a bit wet is a lot better than being left stranded). If the water is muddy you might not be able to see the bottom and gauge its depth. Try and find a stick or an object to find the deepest point.
- If you suspect it's too deep, or you can't be sure, always find another way to your destination. Modern vehicles' door seals are good and keep water out, but this can make a car buoyant, meaning it could begin to float if the water gets too deep leaving you stranded.
- If the puddle is shallow enough to drive through, try and spot any objects that may cause damage to your car's wheels, tyres or suspension, potentially leaving you mid-puddle with a problem. This way you can pick a safe path across.
- Once you've confirmed you can drive through the puddle and determined your route, keep your vehicle in a low gear (second is generally adequate) and engine revs up. This will help you maintain momentum when you travel through the puddle, creating a bow wave so you don't get bogged down.
- Once you exit the other side – and especially if the puddle is on the deep side – pause for a moment if you can to let any excess water drain away and flow back to where it came from.
- If you can't, be aware that grip levels on the road ahead will be diminished, as fluid from the puddle is dropped along the road surface by other cars.
- It's always worthwhile gently brushing your brake pedal on exit, creating some friction and therefore heat to evaporate off any excess moisture. Some luxury vehicles can sense when you've navigated a puddle and automatically do this for you, keeping braking performance as effective as possible.

It is important to remember that on the other side of a puddle grip levels could be lower. If the standing water or obstruction is deeper, and there is no alternative route, contact LEX for further guidance.

What to do if you break down in the rain

If you break down in torrential rain, keep the bonnet closed while waiting for the recovery service, to avoid the electrical system getting soaked.

If your engine cuts out after driving through water, do not attempt to restart it, as engine damage may occur – instead, turn on the hazard lights, call for roadside recovery and have the vehicle professionally examined.

If you breakdown on a motorway try to get away from the traffic – exit the motorway, get to Emergency Refuge Area or hard shoulder. If that's not possible, move left onto the verge, exit the vehicle on the passenger side and get behind a barrier if you can and it is safe to do so. Call for assistance. If you break down in moving traffic and cannot leave your car, keep your seatbelt and hazard lights on and call 999.

For further guidance or information, please contact a member of the Highways H&S Team.