

Winter Driving with Tire Chains

If you live in the Northern part of the United States you can see and feel the change of seasons. As the seasons begin to change, your driving techniques will also have to change. You must begin to understand the increased driving hazards blowing snow and freezing ice have on your equipment and the road surface.

Breakdowns in the summer months seem to be handled in a timely and safe manner. However, if you breakdown in sub-zero temperatures with several inches of snow at your feet, your repairs become longer, costlier and the entire event will increase your stress level.

The importance of a pre-trip inspection becomes vital. Since bad belts, hoses, pumps, fuel filters and numerous other mechanical items can leave you stranded in the winter, it's best to service them now. Aside from avoiding a roadside break-down, it's a lot less expensive to repair something at your home terminal than on the road where you are at the mercy of the nearest truck repair shop.

What about tire chains?

When the conditions get so bad you need tire chains, many transportation firms have a written driver policy that states: "If the travel conditions require the use of tire chains, pull over in a safe place and, just park the truck until conditions improve."

However, many states have chain laws, and there are as many different chain laws as there are states. They range from no requirements to very detailed laws. The best advice is to check with each state Department of Transportation (DOT) before you begin your trip. Here are some basic rules for using tire chains:

- Before purchasing tire chains, consult your vehicle's manual to see if chains can be used on your vehicle
- Make certain your tire chains are properly sized for your tires. A proper fit is key to performance
- Pull off the highway to a safe place to install or remove chains
- Do not deflate tires to install chains
- Apply as tightly as possible by hand, drive one-quarter mile, stop and check for fit, re-tighten if necessary
- Do not exceed 30 mph while using chains
- Tire chains are not designed for towing vehicles
- If using a traditional link chain, always inspect each chain carefully to remove any tangles or twists prior to installation
- Check for breakage in the chain links, which can be caused by:
 - Driving on twisted links
 - Driving at speeds greater than 30 mph for a prolonged period
 - Extended driving on dry pavement

- Carry rubber adjusters to keep chains tight
- Always pre-fit chains to your vehicle before they are actually needed; while the chains may be uniform in size, tires are not – they vary by manufacturer, age, tread and type
- After use, rinse your chains and spray them with an all-purpose lubricant to retard rust and increase useful life
- Carrying tire chains can add additional weight; on average, tire chains weigh approximately 52 lbs. per pair for singles, and 92 lbs. for a pair of duals

A useful web site to check before you make your next trip, www.nws.noaa.gov