

Driving in a Disaster

Safety Tips for Motorists

After almost every disaster, search and rescue teams find victims who might have survived if they had known whether to stay with or leave their cars. The following are safety tips for drivers in various types of emergencies. This information should be kept in the glove compartment of your car. In any situation, the most important rule is — **Don't panic!**

Listen to radio or television for the latest National Weather Service bulletins on severe weather for the area in which you will drive. In times of developing emergencies, keep a radio or television on and await instructions. If evacuation is recommended, move quickly but calmly, following instructions as to which route to be used, evacuation shelter to be sought, and other directions.

HURRICANES — EVACUATE EARLY

Flooding can begin well before a hurricane nears land. Plan to evacuate early, and keep a full tank of gas during the hurricane season. Learn the best evacuation route before a storm forms, and make arrangements with friends or relatives inland to stay with them until the storm has passed. Never attempt to drive during a hurricane, and wait until the “all clear” is given after the storm. Flash flooding can occur after a hurricane has passed. Avoid driving on coastal and low-lying roads. Storm surge and hurricane-caused flooding are erratic and may occur with little or no warning — and in some locations, such as Wellfleet Harbor, can occur hours after the storm appears to have passed.

FLOOD — GET OUT OF THE CAR

Never attempt to drive through water on a road. Water can be deeper than it appears and water levels can rise very quickly. Most cars will float for at least a short while. A car can be buoyed by

floodwaters and then swept downstream during a flood. Floodwaters also can erode roadways, and a missing section of road—even a missing bridge—will not be visible with water running over the area. Wade through floodwaters only if the water is not flowing rapidly and only in waters no higher than the knees. If a car stalls in floodwater, get out quickly and move to higher ground. The floodwaters may still be rising, and the car could get swept away at any moment.

TORNADO — GET OUT OF THE CAR

A car is the least safe place to be in a tornado. When a warning is issued, do not try to leave the area by car. If you are in a car, leave it and find shelter in a building. If a tornado approaches and there are no safe structures nearby, lie flat in a ditch or other ground depression with your arms over your head.

SUMMER HEAT — STAY OUT OF A PARKED CAR

During hot weather, heat build-up in a closed or nearly closed car can occur quickly and intensely. Children and pets can die from heat stroke in a matter of

MINUTES when left in a closed car. NEVER leave anyone in a parked car during periods of high summer heat.

ALWAYS KEEP EMERGENCY SUPPLIES IN YOUR VEHICLE

Cars should be equipped with supplies that could be useful in any emergency. The supplies in the kit should include, at a minimum:

- ☐ blanket/sleeping bag
- ☐ jumper cables and tools
- ☐ bottled water
- ☐ canned fruits and nuts and manual can opener
- ☐ first aid kit
- ☐ flashlight and extra batteries
- ☐ rain gear and extra clothes
- ☐ necessary medication
- ☐ matches and candles
- ☐ shovel (not just for winter travel)

Sources:
The American Red Cross.



Photos courtesy of the NASA Project at Prescott College, AZ.