

DRIVING IN AUTUMN

It's An Unpredictable Time

Autumn can be the nicest time of year, but it demands a lot from the professional driver. It's a time when you don't know whether you'll be in winter, summer, or somewhere in between. You have to be prepared for any kind of weather, and you may see all kinds of weather in a single trip.

Why It's Dangerous

Winter's just around the corner, yet you haven't seen the last of the hot weather. Everyone has grown accustomed to summers long days and it's been months since anyone had to drive on snow or ice.

All this makes it hard to adjust to shortening days and the fact that darkness now sets in at periods when we've gotten used to driving in daylight. It's particularly hard to make the adjustment when clocks are set back to standard time at the end of October. You'll be driving more hours in darkness now, and you'll need to slow down to compensate for diminished visibility.

Fog and Rain

You may find yourself in a

sudden rainstorm, and it can turn quickly to snow. You may also encounter severe fog conditions.

If fog sets in, stop if you can. If not, be sure to drive with your low beams and stay well behind the taillights of the next vehicle. You may not stop in time if it has to stop quickly. Slow down gradually when you suddenly encounter fog. The driver behind may hit you if you slow too quickly.

Rain can be a problem, too, in areas which experience dry summers. The first

moisture of the fall mixes with oil and grease on the dusty highway to form a slick surface that's highly dangerous. Drive with extreme caution until the rain has washed this mixture away.

Sudden Snowstorms

The first wintry blizzards of the year can hit with amazing swiftness in the early days of autumn. Your vehicle should be winterized early to cope with these fall storms. Start carrying chains and be prepared to slow down drastically if you find yourself

on snow and ice on a day that started out feeling like summer.

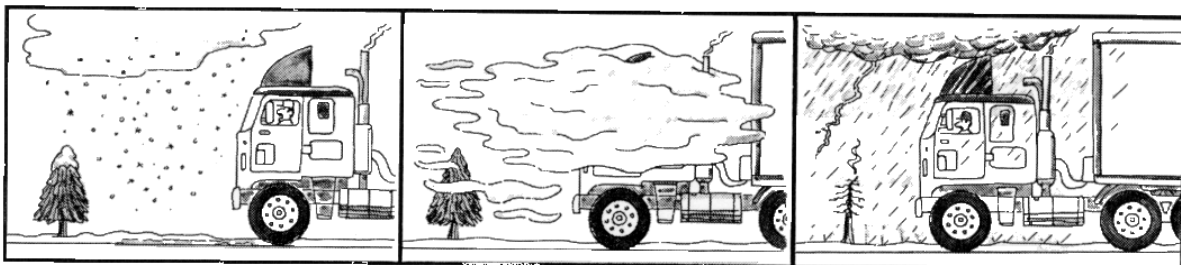
You may see a heavy rain before it turns to snow. If you don't slow down at that point, you're in danger of hydroplaning, when the tread of your tires loses its grip and your vehicle literally skims along the road on a thin film of water.

Drive in the tire tracks of vehicles ahead of you and you're less likely to hydroplane. But keep a safe distance.

If you do hydroplane, skillful driving is an essential. With no traction to begin with, hitting the brakes is sure to put you into a skid. Ease off the accelerator until you slow down and regain traction. If you need to brake after that, use a light touch.

Be Prepared For Anything

An autumn snowstorm may leave the highway white for a time, and then it may all melt as quickly as it came. In the fall, you've got to be prepared for anything.



In the fall, the weather can change quickly and with little warning.