

When the Going Gets Rough

What To Do in a Skid

The best solutions to a skid is to avoid it. Know how to deal with skids if they occur, but know that an ounce of prevention, when it comes to this dangerous situation, is truly worth a pound of cure.

The Panic Response

In many accidents, at least one vehicle skids. In some cases the crash occurs as a result of the skid. In others, an emergency situation has already developed and someone slams on the brakes in a state of panic. That's a bad mistake.

Even in a close call, you still have room to maneuver. If you slam on the brakes, you've lost control and cheated yourself out of this maneuvering room. As a professional, you can learn to avoid the panic response and react in a way that will keep you out of trouble in many situations.

Evasive Action

You can often avoid a crash by steering around a hazard, even if it means leaving the roadway for a brief time or by braking safely if you don't have room to go around. It sometimes works to brake steadily until you're nearly stopped, then ease off before your brakes lock up. But you may not know when they'll lock. In that case, it's smarter to use "stab braking."

Stab your brakes repeatedly. Apply them until they lock, then let go. Wait a fraction of a second, and then do it again. The aim, once again, is to avoid a skid.

Preventing Skids

Panic stops aren't the only cause of skids. Your vehicle can skid when you are putting on the brakes, turning or speeding up. But there is a lot you can do to keep this from happening.

Adjust your speed to conditions. Make speed changes smoothly. Avoid tailgating. If you give yourself plenty of room, you won't have to hit the brakes too hard. Likewise, don't accelerate abruptly. A heavy foot on the pedal can send you into a power skid.

It's also crucial to keep your tires and brakes in top shape, and to be sure your fifth wheel is well lubricated. You can go into a frontwheel skid if your load shifts and too much weight bears down on a still fifth wheel.

When Skids Happen

Your best friend in a skid is your steering wheel. Keep your foot off the brake as well as the accelerator and steer yourself out of a jam by pointing the wheels in the same direction that the rear axle is going. If it's heading right, steer to the right and if left, steer left.

If either the tractor or trailer locks up and forces the other half of the rig to swing out, it's important to straighten out fast. That's because one of your greatest fears when you go into a skid is that the rig will jackknife. It's almost impossible to recover after the angle reaches 15 degrees.

Here, especially, the rule of thumb is to do everything you can to avoid getting into this jam in the first place. Drive smoothly and keep your brakes well adjusted. Give yourself room to avoid problems, rather than having to over-react to them. Avoid over-use of your hand valve.

Know What To Do

You can find yourself in a skid at any time. Know how to avoid skids, but know how to get out of them if they ever occur. It can make a big difference to your safety.