

Be Tire Smart! Play your PART.

When you can see your breath, it's time for winter tires

Motorists should stop thinking of winter tires as 'snow tires' and start thinking of them as 'cold weather' tires

To educate drivers about winter tires and winter driving and to help them determine if winter tires are right for them, Canada's tire makers have recently released a comprehensive winter tire and driving brochure that is available free from participating tire retailers.

Beyond slowing down, being patient and driving with caution, the most important decision for vehicle owners at this time of year is whether to install winter tires. And recent advances in winter tire technology are giving drivers more reason to invest in winter tires.

"The latest generations of winter tires offer motorists an important driving performance advantage in all winter-driving conditions, including dry road surfaces," says Glenn Maidment, President of the Rubber Association of Canada (RAC), which represents Canada's tire makers. "All tire rubber will begin to stiffen as the weather gets colder, but today's winter tires maintain their elasticity even at extremely low temperatures approaching minus 30 degrees Celsius. The result is superior traction and handling whether the roadway is snowy, icy, slush covered or dry."

Traditionally, many drivers, particularly those who live in cities or towns where the streets are cleared regularly, have opted for all-season tires to avoid the cost and inconvenience of the bi-annual winter tire changeover.

Even though all-season tires can provide safe all-weather performance, drivers need to know that the efficiency of winter tires greatly surpasses them once temperatures fall below seven degrees Celsius. Modern winter tires offer up to 50 per cent more winter traction than all-season tires, which translates to shorter stopping distances and better vehicle cornering and control.

"The cold-weather traction advantage offered by today's winter tires is considerable," says Maidment. "Motorists should stop thinking of winter tires as 'snow tires' and start thinking of them as 'cold weather' tires".

The RAC recommends that drivers not wait for the first snowfall, or their first encounter with black ice, to switch over to winter tires. The proper time to changeover is when the temperature dips below seven degrees Celsius, or when people can see their breath.

Canada's tire makers also advise motorists to use winter tires on all wheel positions. Using winter tires on the front or rear axle only can create a serious traction imbalance that can lead to a loss of control, particularly when cornering.

When shopping for winter tires, motorists can identify a winter tire by looking for the mountain snowflake symbol on the sidewall. Tires stamped with this distinctive symbol meet or exceed specific snow traction requirements established by the tire industry.

Proper tire maintenance and inflation are also important contributors to safe winter driving. Motorists should remember that excessive tread wear can diminish traction and, as a result, tread depth should always be checked at the start of the winter driving season.

Drivers who are unsure if their tires are overly worn should consult their tire dealer to determine if their tires should be replaced.

Proper tire inflation is another winter driving priority. Tires that are under-or-over inflated have a smaller footprint on the road surface, which weakens their grip. The result is reduced stopping and handling capabilities. Under-inflated tires also waste fuel due to increased rolling resistance.

Every five degrees Celsius change in temperature results in about one psi change in pressure, so a temperature drop of 15 degrees Celsius would result in 10 per cent or three psi under-inflation.

Drivers should invest in a reliable tire gauge and measure their tire pressure monthly to ensure their tires are always inflated to the vehicle manufacturer's recommendation.

Drivers can also learn more about winter tires by visiting the RAC's website RubberAssociation.ca.

"Drivers should educate themselves to determine if winter tires are right for their driving habits and local driving conditions," says Maidment. "Motorists are encouraged to drop by their local tire retailers to pick up a copy of our new brochure and learn more about their winter tire options."

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Sidebar:

Winter Tire Buyer's Check List

Whether you live in the city or country, or whether you drive a big or small vehicle, winter driving conditions will impact your vehicle's performance.

When deciding whether to install winter tires, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you live where cold temperatures are common?
- Do you drive on icy or snowy roads?
- Do you have to use your vehicle everyday, regardless of the weather?
- Do you drive off main streets and roads in winter?
- Do you drive early in the morning or late at night in winter?
- Do you drive nearly the same speed regardless of the temperature?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, winter tires may be right for you.

Talk to your tire dealer about your driving habits and what kind of conditions you drive in and what kinds of winter tires are best suited for you.