

DOT Urges Caution With Flood Conditions

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Most of western North Carolina is under a flash flood watch through Thursday. The N.C. Department of Transportation reminds motorists that heavy rains and rushing water can create hazardous driving conditions, which increase the likelihood of an accident.

According to NCDOT statewide crash data, rain or wet road surfaces were a factor in 198,033 crashes between 2006 and 2010. Of those, 972 crashes were fatal, and 94,141 involved injuries.

The best ways to stay safe during this type of weather are to drive defensively and stay alert. No matter what kind of vehicle you drive, never drive through standing or rushing water. To help keep you and your loved ones safe when driving in bad weather, always:

- Avoid driving through flooded areas, even if they seem shallow. Just one foot of water can float many vehicles, while two feet of rushing water can carry away SUVs and pick-ups;
- After driving through a puddle, tap your brake pedal to help dry your brake rotors;
- If your car starts to hydroplane, take your foot off the gas, apply the brakes in a steady, slightly firm manner without stomping and steer in the direction of the skid. If you have a manual transmission, push in the clutch and let the car slow down on its own;
- If the rain is extremely heavy, pull over in a safe area in a parking lot or on the roadside with your emergency flashers on, away from any trees or other tall objects, and wait for the weather to improve;
- Allow more travel time;
- Turn on your low beam headlights and use the defroster to increase visibility;
- If possible, stay in the middle lane where the road tends to be higher;
- Reduce your speed by at least five to 10 miles per hour and allow at least twice the normal following distance;
- Signal for turns ahead of time and brake early as you near a stop. Remember, roads are slickest in the first 10 to 15 minutes, especially if it has not rained for a while; and
- If a traffic signal is knocked out by a storm, regard the intersection as a four-way stop. If two or more vehicles arrive at the same time, the car to the right has the right of way and after signaling, may move in any direction. If two facing vehicles approach the intersection at the same time, any car traveling straight ahead or turning right has the right of way.