

What to Do If a Blizzard Traps Your Car

Snowstorms are best enjoyed curled up on the couch, watching the flurries from indoors with loved ones. But, if the unlikely occurs and you do find yourself trapped in your car during a blizzard, it's important to know what to do. Do you call for help right away? Do you get out of the car? What supplies should you have just in case?

"The first thing to do is remain calm," said Aaron Laurich, paramedic for the travel firm Global Rescue and former U.S. Army combat medic. Here's something you should have in your car at all times in case a blizzard strikes...

Be Prepared With An Emergency Kit

There are a few things you can do to prepare yourself for a snow-in situation. First, make sure your car is stocked with supplies in winter if you live in an at-risk area. "Absolutely keep an emergency kit [in your car], and keep your gas tank above three quarters," Laurich said.

The fuel adds weight to your car, which keeps the vehicle centered on the road while allowing for better handling in icy situations.

Laurich also recommends keeping the following in your vehicle during winter:

- Warm, dry layers
- Blankets
- Jumper cables
- Flashlight
- Signal devices like flares "to let rescuers know of your location"
- Food that is easily digestible and easily stored, like granola bars
- A small shovel

Have A Source Of Water

In case you find yourself stuck, it's essential to have enough water.

"Keep around three gallons per person per day," Laurich said. "That's the general rule, but it's a lot of water to carry so as long as you have some [you should be fine]. I also recommend you keep a water container or metal jug to collect snow in."

In an emergency situation, potable water can be retrieved from snow by melting it on your dashboard in a container.

"Let it melt first because you burn up energy trying to melt it as you take it in," Laurich said. "So if you have a stove, melt the snow in small quantities or in a metal jug."

Keep Your Vehicle Well-Serviced

Another way to be prepared for blizzard driving is to keep your car well-maintained.

"Regular maintenance and recommended oil changes [are important]," Laurich said. "In wintertime, make sure you have good tires -- snow tires with good tread. Refilling windshield washer fluid is not a bad idea either."

Laurich also recommended weighing down your car by keeping a sandbag or a bag of kitty litter in the back. By doing this, you're increasing stopping time and traction while decreasing potential swerving.

Take Inventory Of The Situation

If you do find yourself driving in the midst of a blizzard, it's important to remain calm and take inventory of your situation. Where are you? Are you stuck? Are you on the road or off?

"If you are stuck, make sure the exhaust pipe is clear," Laurich said. "If your pipe is blocked, and your car is running, you could get backup of exhaust gases."

Laurich also recommended putting up roadside flares in front of and behind your vehicle -- especially if you're located on a curve.

"Make yourself visible," Laurich said. Then, call 911 if a phone is available.

Stay In Your Vehicle

Should you stay or should you go? The golden rule is to stay in your stranded vehicle, unless you're in sight of a building. In that case, seek alternative shelter.

"The difficulty comes if you're in a white-out blizzard because leaving [your car] could leave you disoriented," Laurich said. "The car is a safe place."

Once you've assessed your situation, shovel out a trench in front of your tires. Then, put down sand or kitty litter, and use that as traction to get back on the road. Once you're mobile, find a more suitable spot -- like a parking lot or a clearing -- to pull over and find safety.

Stay Warm

If you're going to be inside your vehicle for a long period of time, warmth is key.

"Circulation will drop and so will body temperature," Laurich said. "Do some workouts and keep moving. Get in the back seat so you can stretch your legs. Keep the blood flowing. Run your car for 10 minutes every hour after making sure the exhaust is clear."

While your car is on, you can charge your phone and put a container of snow on the dashboard to melt for water.

Don't Drive In Storms

Finally, the best thing you can do to avoid getting stuck in a blizzard is to not drive during one.

"Prevention is worth everything in cases like this," Laurich said. But if you must brave the elements, be sure to dress the part. "If you live in a city -- a lot of people commute to work and are not dressed for winter -- keep extra layers in your car. It doesn't take much to throw those items in the back."