

## COMMUNITY CORNER

# Prepare for winter driving months, commander cautions

By Col. Kevin Brown  
GARRISON COMMANDER

**W**hat do ants and winter driving safety have in common? Preparation. Young or old, we can all learn from one of nature's smallest creatures. Ants store food in the summer because they know the time to prepare for the hazardous conditions is not during the winter. But most of us, unfortunately, are more like grasshoppers.

The grasshopper spends the warm months enjoying the sunny breezes and lazy afternoons without a care for the harsh winter realities just around the corner, according to Aesop's famous fable. When winter arrives, the grasshopper finds itself dying of hunger, while the ant is equipped for survival. This lesson is simple, yet profound.

## PREPARE

Most people who value preparation know the best tip for winter driving is sometimes to just stay at home, or at least remain where you are until snow plows and sanding crews have done their work. If you crash on a snowy or icy road, you'll certainly be late — or worse.

But since you can't always call in to work claiming a "snow day," it is much better to be prepared to correctly deal with driving in the snow and inclement weather.

First, be informed. Find out both the current weather situation and the forecast for the day. The Fort Riley homepage at [www.rileyarmy.mil](http://www.rileyarmy.mil) provides a wealth of information concerning road conditions, weather forecasts, road closures, early releases or late arrivals on post.

Through the At-Home service, you can receive up-to-the-minute weather updates, or call the automated communicator board at 785-239-3700 or toll

free 866-562-7319.

## PREPARE YOUR VEHICLE

The winter months are hard on your vehicle. Cold temperatures can affect its operation, while dirt and road-salt residue can cause problems with its physical condition. Snow and ice limit traction, and potholes damage wheels and tires. Simple checks and maintenance items can keep your vehicle in top condition.

• Consider using snow tires. The condition of your car's tires is crucial during winter. If your tires are worn, or they are not all-season tires or tires designed for winter, they will adversely affect the braking, handling and overall performance of your car in winter conditions.

• Check the tire pressure. Tire pressure is especially important during the winter. It is crucial to have properly inflated tires as this guarantees the best possible contact between the tire and the road.

A properly inflated tire also will help protect against wheel damage that might occur as the vehicle is driven over potholes. Read your owner's manual to find the correct tire pressures.

• Make sure your vehicle's four-wheel drive system is working properly. A big selling point for sport utility vehicles is they offer four-wheel drive, which improves traction in slippery conditions.

But most people don't use their four-wheel drive systems during the summer. And while a 4WD system requires minimal maintenance, it's still a good idea to check that it works properly before the onset of winter.

• Change the engine oil and adjust the viscosity grade. This isn't nearly as hard as it sounds.



Col. Brown

Viscosity simply refers to how thick or thin the oil is. Tar has a higher viscosity than orange juice, for example.

Engine oils are sold with different levels of viscosity. When winter arrives, the outside temperature drops. And just like you, the oil inside your vehicle's engine isn't feeling too perky after sitting in the cold all night.

Follow your manufacturer's recommendations in your owner's manual for the proper viscosity of the oil by the temperature you will be doing most of your driving in. Also, dirty oil doesn't circulate as well as clean oil.

• Inspect the belts and hoses. The condition of your belts and hoses is critical in modern cars. Most have serpentine-type belts, these systems use a single belt wrapped around a series of pulleys and guides with a tensioner to keep them from coming off.

Check your belts for cracking, glazing and replace as required. Inspect your hoses for signs of deterioration, cracks or bubbling on the exterior surface.

Before winter arrives have a mechanic take a look at your car for winter servicing.

• Inspect the wipers and wiper fluid. The condition of your wipers is crucial during winter months since they clean water, ice and snow off your windshield allowing you to see the road.

The life expectancy of your wiper blades is dependent on the amount of use and environmental conditions. If your wiper blades cause streaking when used, replace them.

Make sure you change the wiper fluid from a summer blend to a winter blend so your system doesn't freeze up on you. Check your wiper fluid levels frequently during winter.

• Check the battery. A tell-tale sign that you have a bad battery is when the weather changes and the temperature

drops and you try to start your car, you hear a clicking sound from your engine compartment or nothing happens when you turn the key.

Cold temperatures can reduce a vehicle's battery power by up to 50 percent. If your vehicle battery is older than three years, have it tested at a certified automotive repair facility. Make sure the posts and connections are free of corrosion.

• Check antifreeze mixture. Always have your antifreeze protection level checked. You can take purchase testers for a few dollars at the automotive parts store or have a mechanic check it for you.

• Failure to ensure your anti-freeze will protect your engine for the temperatures in which you will operate could cause your engine and radiator to burst when the mixture freezes.

• Carry an emergency kit inside the car. Things you might want to consider carrying include a flashlight, flares, first aid kit, jumper cables, a tool kit, tire chains, a blanket, warm clothes, gloves, paper towels and a bag of abrasive material such as sand, salt or non-clumping kitty litter.

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• Run the air conditioner. In order to remove condensation and frost from the interior of windows, engage your air conditioner and select the fresh air option: It's fine to set the temperature on "hot." Many cars automatically do this when you choose the defrost setting.

• Check your lights. Use your headlights so that others will see you, we hope, not pull out in front of you.

Make sure your headlights and taillights are clear of snow. If you have an older car with sand-pitted headlights, get a new set of lenses. To prevent future pitting, cover the new lenses with a clear tape such as that used to protect the leading edge of helicopter rotor blades and race car wings. It's available from auto-racing supply sites.

• Give yourself a brake. Learn how to get maximum efficiency from your brakes before an emergency.

It's easy to properly use anti-lock brakes: Stomp, stay and steer. Stomp on the pedal as if you were trying to snap it off. Stay hard on the pedal. Steer around the obstacle. (A warning:

A little bit of steering goes a very long way in an emergency.) If you drive on icy roads or roads covered with snow, modify your ABS technique: After you stomp and the ABS begins cycling — you will feel pulses in the pedal or hear the system working — ease up slightly on the pedal until the pulsing happens only once a second.

For vehicles without ABS, you'll have to rely on the old-fashioned system: You. For non-ABS on a mixed-surface road, push the brake pedal hard until the wheels stop rolling, then immediately release the brake enough to allow the wheels to begin turning again.

Repeat this sequence rapidly. This is not the same as pumping the brake. Your goal is to have the tires producing maximum grip regardless of whether the surface is snow, ice or damp pavement.

• Watch carefully for black ice. If the road looks slick, it probably is. This is especially true with one of winter's worst hazards: black ice.

Also called glare ice, this is nearly transparent ice that often looks like a harmless puddle or is overlooked entirely. Test the traction with a smooth brake application or

slight turn of the wheel.

• Remember where icy roads tend to occur. Bridges and intersections are common places and also wherever water runs across the road.

• Too much steering is bad. If a slick section in a turn causes your front tires to lose grip, the common — but incorrect — reaction is to continue turning the steering wheel.

If the icy conditions end and the front tires regain grip, your car will dart whichever way the wheels are pointed. That may be into oncoming traffic or a telephone pole.

Something very similar happens if you steer too much while braking with ABS.

• Avoid rear-tire slides. First, choose a car with electronic stability control. Next, make sure your rear tires have at least as much tread as your front tires. Finally, if you buy winter tires, get four.

• Technology offers no miracles. All-wheel drive and electronic stability control can get you into trouble by offering a false sense of security. All-wheel drive can only help a vehicle accelerate or keep moving. It can't help you go around a snow-covered turn, much less stop at an icy intersection.

Electronic stability control can prevent a spinout, but it can't clear a car from the roads or give your tires more traction. Don't let these lull you into overestimating the available traction.

Driving safely in the winter takes practice, experience and good judgment. Let's all arrive at our destinations safely and take care of one another as responsible members of this community. Let's follow the wisdom of the ant, and prepare for safe driving this winter.

If you would like to comment on this article or suggest a topic for Community Corner, e-mail [rile\\_post\\_newspaper@onus.army.mil](mailto:rile_post_newspaper@onus.army.mil).

## AAFES Exchange recognized as top military-friendly employer

AAFES PUBLIC AFFAIRS

DALLAS — With more than 4,000 veterans on staff, some 900 of which were hired this year, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service has been included in G.I. Jobs Magazine's Top 100 Military-Friendly Employers for 2011.

The magazine considered 5,000 companies with a minimum of \$500 million in an-

nual revenues before naming its top picks.

Criteria used to compile the list included assets dedicated to hiring military members; Reserve and Guard policies; percentage of new veteran hires; internal military and veteran recruiting, training and promotional programs, as well as veteran community outreach programs.

The Exchange is a natural

fit for servicemembers looking to transition from one side of the counter to the other and may spell mission complete for their job search," said James Moore, the exchange's senior vice president of human resources.

The list can assist servicemembers looking to make a transition from the military identify those companies most likely to hire veterans.

## Home wanted

Ark

Ark is a German-shepherd mix and is about 8 months old. He's still a puppy and very playful. Ark is not neutered, but he is house broken. He has had all of his vaccinations and has a micro-chip. Ark appears to get along with cats, but it is unknown whether he gets along with other dogs. It is recommended he go to a home with older children.

Fort Riley Stray Facility  
Building 226 Custer Ave., Main Post  
Noon to 4 p.m.  
Monday through Friday  
785-239-6183

