

Safety Bulletin

Winter Driving In Iraq OIF SB-019

The winter months in Iraq are challenging under any circumstance, even more so with the large heavy vehicles we are currently operating. Road grime, wet conditions, and mud that is slippery than _____ (place appropriate word here), all decrease the stopping distances of our vehicles. If you add these in with poor maintenance (tires, brakes, etc) you have an ugly receipt for disaster. Increasing these hazards are the narrow roads, sometimes only wide enough to get a vehicle down, or trails with drop-offs that lead into water filled canals. It is evident that our controls must be effective and properly implemented.

Tire pressures must be correct. Under inflated or over inflated tires will cause less tire surface to make contact with the roadways. This will also cause vehicles to be more prone to rolling over during a skid. Additionally, ensure that tire tread is good and that the wear pattern is equal across the tire surface.

Windshield wipers and motors must be checked regularly. Finding out that you cannot see through your windshield while out on a mission is dangerous and deadly. Also ensure that your wiper fluid is not pure water. Water will freeze upon contact and make it impossible to see. Don't forget that your headlights and tail lights also need to be cleaned before every mission and at every stopping point.

Operators must avoid making sudden maneuvers including, increasing or decreasing speeds as well as braking. Radical maneuvers can cause the loss of vehicle control. Use gradual acceleration and deceleration along with gradual stops. This requires crews to be thinking well ahead of the vehicle and to plan every action.

When driving at night or while using night vision devices it can be difficult to see weather conditions deteriorate. Fog, rain, and dust all are indicators that vehicle speeds need to decrease. Furthermore, not driving your headlights is a common mistake that must be addressed. That turn or barrier that pops out of the fog or rain at 40MPH will be impossible to negotiate. Increase vehicle separation, as CREW systems will allow and SLOW DOWN!!!

Water on road surfaces can and will cause hydroplaning regardless of vehicle weight. Always slow down when entering an area that is covered with water. Water covered roads and areas have additional hazards. You do not know if the roadway has been washed away or contains a hidden canal, sewage pit, or IED. Never drive through an area that you do not know what is under the water. Also remember that canal banks will become water logged and thus, will be more prone to "giving way". This has led to many rollovers and deaths.

We should also be thinking about our gunners and other personnel that are exposed during the cold or wet weather. They must have on eye protection, this is a given. However, we need to protect against wind-chill and the possibility of chilblain or frostbit. If the temperature is below freezing and you are cold sitting still, imagine what it will feel like at 40MPH. Consideration should be given to wearing ballistic face shields and balaclavas to reduce skin exposure.

Personnel need to be dressed for conditions. Wearing or taking personal equipment should not be an option. Having it with you will allow you to put it on as temperatures decrease, however, leaving it in your sleeping area will not do anyone any good. Gloves, knit caps, and other items that can be layered will help you keep warm and ready to fight. Use caution with materials that will melt in a fire.

When performing PMCS on our vehicles crew members must remain focused. With colder temperatures it is likely that frost or ice will have formed on vehicle surfaces. Maintaining 3-points of contact is mandatory when ever a Soldier is on top of the vehicle regardless of height. Jumping from a vehicle is not only a bad idea this act has removed Soldiers from the fight when they were injured.

The vehicles we operate are well designed and continually function in spite of the conditions we operate in. We all know that vehicle maintenance is critical at all times and that the winter months require additional vehicle checks; all Leaders and Soldiers must ensure the following:

- Ensure that heater systems are functioning, including hoses and vents.
- Ensure that switching systems are functioning and not rigged.
- Ensure that coolant lines are in good condition with no leaks.
- Engines may need to warm up, never "race" and engine. Racing cold engines will decrease service life.
- Exhaust systems need to be checked for leaks. Any leaks will increase the chances of CO₂ poisoning.
- Check head lights, tail lights, and turn signals for function and cleanliness.
- Check windshield wipers, motors, and fluid.
- Check fire extinguishers for serviceability including hand held and mounted systems.
- Ensure that tire pressure is correct on all tires.

Commanders and Leaders are responsible for establishing and implementing hazard controls for wet weather hazards. This includes ensuring that personnel are trained to recognize hazards and the actions to take when a hazard is encountered. Soldiers are required to implement and follow controls, to include wearing seatbelts and harnesses.

Why put the live of your comrades at stake.

Use caution, use good judgment, use crew coordination, and use Composite Risk Management!!

