

This is Troy Nicolini with the National Weather Service with a message about the dangers of small hail on roads.

Northwest California doesn't have the same weather hazards as the rest of the nation. For example, we physically cannot get hurricanes here because the ocean is too cold. Unfortunately, the weather hazards we do have can be deceptive ..and this can actually make them more dangerous. For example, the cold swift waters of some of our rivers can conceal their danger under warm sunny skies. And sneaker waves at the beach can catch people off guard because the ocean can look calm before the waves strike. Winter also provides some deceptive hazards. Sure, we also have the more obvious hazards such as heavy rain, fog, and snow that can cause poor driving conditions that lead to vehicle accidents. However, small hail is a less obvious weather hazard that actually results in the greatest number of serious weather related accidents along the Northcoast.

During the rainy season, cold storm systems can dive south from the Gulf of Alaska bringing increased snowfall to the mountains, and showers to the coast. The strongest showers can also produce small hail and this can lead to very slick roadways and dangerous driving conditions.

Dark clouds are the first sign that there might be hail on the road ahead. If you see dark clouds, slow down. Be prepared for slick roadways, both from rain and small hail. Turn off your cruise control to allow yourself to react to sudden weather changes. Additionally, remember to turn on your headlights to improve your visibility.

If you encounter small hail on the roadway, slow down by taking your foot off the gas pedal. Do not slam on the brakes or make any sudden steering adjustments. Most importantly, don't panic! Be relaxed and keep your car under control.

If you spin out of control and end up on the side of the road because of small hail..or you pull over; remember to stay in your car and keep children inside the car. And keep your seat belts on. This is an extremely important safety precaution because the next car that comes along may also spin out of control and head for your car. You are safest inside your car with your seat belts on.

Of course you also want to check the weather forecast as you plan your travel so you can avoid small hail in the first place.

Knowing how to be prepared for and react to small hail while driving will allow you to stay safe this winter season.

This has been Troy Nicolini for Community Comment