

This is Troy Nicolini with the National Weather Service with your Community Comment.

The days are getting shorter and there's a nip in the air...not to mention rain in the forecast. Yep, the wet season is just around the corner. This is a great time to prepare yourself and your family for winter on the north coast. ~~For the National Weather Service, the official start of the wet season is October 15 because that's about the time of year we start to see the first rains. That gives you just about three weeks to get ready in case we have an early season storm.~~ As you get prepared, remember that the greatest threat from winter storms is their impact on driving safety. Heavy rain can impact visibility and traction and can cause rock slides onto roadways...as well as flooded roadways. High winds can knock trees onto the road, and small hail is particularly dangerous because it causes roads to become very slippery with little warning. By preparing your car in advance, however, and remembering some basic safety tips, you can stay safe to winter.

Prepare your car by checking your tires to ensure you have enough tread so that you don't lose traction on super wet roads. If you don't know what to look for then any tire shop will gladly provide advice. Also check your headlight lenses. Almost all newer cars have plastic headlight lenses that yellow over time from exposure to the sun so that your headlights are not as bright. During dark and rainy nights this can restrict how well you can see hazards ahead, like rock slides, ponding water, or downed trees. You can get kits for buffing your headlight lenses or have your auto shop do it. Also check your windshield wipers. If they are worn, then that can also limit how well you can see hazards ahead. To check them, start by cleaning them with a clean rag and some window cleaner and then run them with some water on your windshield. A good blade should travel smoothly and quietly across your windshield and leave no area untouched by the blade. Also, top off your window washer reservoir since winter roads can have mud and water that can fling up onto your windshield at the worst possible time.

Modifying your driving habits during the wet season is also very important. There are two critical safety rules to remember: First, plan your travel around the weather, if you can. If the National Weather Service has issued a high wind warning, then avoid driving where there are trees near the road. If there is heavy rain in the forecast, then consider taking routes that avoid low lying areas that are prone to flooding ... or delay your travel. And of course, if we are forecasting snow over the passes, consider delaying your trip or use alternate routes that stay at lower elevations.

The second critical safety rule is to slow down. Every hazard that winter weather can throw at you is more survivable if you are traveling slower. So just get into a winter weather driving mind set and allow extra time and take it easy on the road. Not only will you be safer, but you will also be able to enjoy the beautiful scenery of the North Coast in winter.

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