

Take time out for safety

Deb Severin, FH

Beginning next week, our commute to and from work will likely be in darkness, thanks to the end of daylight-saving time on Oct. 28 and the shorter days that accompany autumn and winter. Autumn can be the nicest time of the year, but it demands a lot from drivers. It's a time when you don't know what to expect from the weather, but you will need to be prepared.

It is important to remember that bad weather doesn't cause accidents. Weather conditions create driving hazards, and it is up to the driver to know how to deal with them.

Many of us have been driving for a number of years and, based on our experiences, we have a feeling of complete control. Overconfidence sets in and we begin to take unnecessary risks. We never believe that taking these risks could hurt us.

Most studies indicate that anywhere from 86 to 94 percent of all accidents can be attributed to driver error.

That's not just errors drivers make while they are on the road. There are many errors in judgment that a driver can make before he or she even turns the key in the ignition.

We all are getting an extra hour on Sunday with the time change. Why not put that extra hour to good use by giving your vehicle a pre-winter checkup?

Here are some preventive maintenance tips to make sure your vehicle is ready for fall and winter driving:

- Reset your car's clock — "fall back" one hour.
- Test your brake lights, headlights, parking lights and turn signals.
- Make sure your battery is fully charged and the connections are clean.
- Check fluid levels.
- Switch to winter-weight oil.
- Check your windshield and rear-window defrosters.
- Make sure your windshield wiper blades are in good condition.
- Clean the windows, inside and out.

- Check your tires, including the spare tire, for air pressure and for sidewall wear and tread depth. You are more likely to hydroplane if the tire pressure is low or the tread is worn.
- Make an appointment to have your mechanic check the air, fuel and emission filters and the exhaust and brake systems.

Fog and rain present some hazardous road conditions. If you must drive, prepare yourself before you leave your driveway:

- Tune in to your local radio weather station for forecasts.
- Make sure the wipers are not frozen to the glass of the windshield or rear window.
- Check your fuel level. Do you have enough fuel in case you need to take a different route to your destination?

And when you set out on wet roads with reduced visibility:

- Watch for pedestrians, cyclists and animals (deer).
- Slow down gradually and don't hit your brakes in a panic. You should always be able to stop within the distance you can see ahead.
- Don't use cruise control.
- Drive in the slow lane (to the right).
- Drive in the tire tracks of vehicles ahead of you. You are less likely to hydroplane.
- Avoid hunching forward to see.
- Never attempt to pass in fog.
- Roll down your window to listen for traffic you cannot see.
- Drive with headlights on low beam.

Remember, don't drive like you own the road. Drive like you own the car. ♦