

Loss Control Insights

DRIVING ON BLACK ICE

If you want to get technical, **black ice** should really be called "clear ice." Because black ice forms with very few air bubbles, it's virtually transparent and much harder to see than normal ice. Drivers usually mistake black ice for wet pavement, so they're often totally unprepared to react to the slippery conditions. One study found that driving on black ice was five times more dangerous than driving in normal conditions. Stopping on black ice takes nine times longer than normal. Studded tires and snow chains can help you stop faster, but not by much.



Making matters worse, black ice can form when you least expect it. A snowfall may have melted days before, but the roads can still have patches of black ice waiting to send your car out of control. Black ice is more likely to cause problems in the mornings and at night when temperatures drop.

You should be particularly wary of driving over bridges and overpasses once freezing winter temperatures kick in, but black ice also can form on shaded sections of the road. Besides driving slowly and carefully, there's not much else you can do when you find yourself on black ice. If you're fortunate, the highway department will have treated the roads with salt or sand, but even then your car's stopping distance and handling will be impaired.

Black ice is so dangerous because it is almost invisible. The road surface looks bare and dry, and the driver feels safe driving at normal speeds.

These are some road conditions which might suggest black ice:

1. Temperatures just above or below freezing.
2. A dark or dull appearance to the pavement.
3. Sections of the road which are shaded by trees or other obstructions like the downward side of an east-west hill. This would include areas the morning sunlight has not yet reached.
 - Bridges, overpasses and underpasses.
 - Damp areas where the road follows a lakeshore or riverbank.
 - Places where you have encountered black ice in the past.

Heed the radio and TV road reports and try to avoid traveling on black ice. If you do suspect this road condition, drive slowly and use extreme caution. Avoid braking, accelerating, passing or turning sharply. Get off the road as soon as you can do so safely if you or other drivers are not able to drive in control.

Rehearse winter driving in an empty parking lot. Make your vehicle slide and skid, and practice correcting these maneuvers. Learn to stop and turn without losing control on snow and ice. Black ice can take a driver completely by surprise. You can avoid black ice accidents by learning to read the road conditions.