

STORMY WEATHER

CASES OF EXTREME WEATHER IN THE UK ARE BECOMING MORE COMMON, WITH TORRENTIAL RAIN AND HIGH WINDS BEING A PARTICULAR PROBLEM FOR DRIVERS.

According to the Met Office, the UK will continue to experience these conditions in the coming years with more winter storms, including disproportionately more severe storms.

This means you need to plan ahead to keep your drivers and vehicles safe while out on business during these extreme weather events. This guide offers a practical overview of the issue and what your business can do.



The common sense approach

If your area is going to be battered by a storm, ask your drivers a simple question – do you need to be going out in this? Avoiding extreme weather conditions is the easiest way to stay safe.

But for essential business journeys during stormy weather, there is a simple checklist to mitigate potential problems on the road. Drivers should:

- **Stay calm** – panicking will only make a situation worse. If you're not comfortable behind the wheel, find a safe place to stop.
- **Slow down** – wet roads make stopping distances longer.
- **Keep your distance** – maintain a safe distance from other traffic. If they panic and swerve, this gives you time to take avoiding action.
- **Drive as smoothly as possible** – reduced grip and traction means you are more likely to skid off the road.
- **Don't take unnecessary risks** – flooded roads can hide dangers such as large potholes. If you're unsure, don't attempt to cross a flooded road.



Preparation is key

An essential step is to make sure your vehicles are properly prepared. Ensure your drivers do a walk around before setting off, checking:

- **Tyres** – do they meet the minimum tread depth requirements and is there any damage to the sidewalls?
- **Wipers** – are the blades in good working order and clear the glass area satisfactorily?
- **Lights** – are they all working and are not obscured by grime?
- **Route planning** – does the intended route go into an area which is likely to be impacted by stormy weather?
- **Communication** – ensure drivers' mobile phones are fully charged in case of an emergency.
- **Fuel** – do you have adequate fuel on-board/charge in the battery?
- **Emergency kit** – do you have essentials such as water and warm clothes in case you get stranded?



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RED has also developed **SafetyFirst** – an e-learning platform to support your business' driver safety programme. To book a demo, click [here](#).



Heavy rain

This is the biggest issue most drivers will face – heavy rain not only makes road conditions treacherous but also reduces visibility dramatically. The key to dealing with heavy rain while driving is to slow down and give yourself time to assess road conditions. This will not only help you deal with longer braking distances in the wet, but also allow you to identify potential hazards on the road ahead, such as:

- **Puddles** – these could be hiding deep potholes
- **Glistening road surface** – this could mean a diesel spill, which will make the road surface very slippery
- **Hazards on the road** – wet leaves can cause a loss of grip/traction.

Water-logged roads also bring the threat of aquaplaning, which is where the tyre cannot cope with the amount of water to displace so simply skims along the surface of the water instead. Drivers often panic when this happens and break heavily, but this can lead to a loss of control as the noise and feel of the anti-lock systems fitted can cause drivers to step off the brakes. To deal with aquaplaning, the best thing to do is ease off the accelerator gently and maintain a firm grip on the steering wheel.

Cancel the cruise

We always advise drivers to not use cruise control in adverse weather conditions – being in full control of the vehicle allows you to make instant adjustments to the accelerator and brake. These split-second decisions can often be key



High winds

Driving in high winds can be terrifying, so it's important to have a strategy in place to deal with this issue. In order to stay safe:

- **Slow down and stay focused** – this will allow you time to react to vehicles being blown into your lane or debris such as tree branches falling on the road.
- **Plan your route** – try to avoid exposed sections of roads where high winds can really wreak havoc.

- **Watch out for high-sided vehicles** – lorries, vans, motorhomes and caravans are all at a higher risk of being blown off course because of their high sides. Give them a wide berth.
- **Get a grip** – strong winds can blow your vehicle around so it's vital to maintain a strong grip on your steering wheel to instantly correct any movements.
- **Read the road** – look ahead for gaps in trees and buildings as these can funnel strong side winds into a particular area.

Floods

If you encounter a flooded road, it is imperative that you stop – if you don't know how deep the water is or what is underneath it, you could find yourself either stuck or with a badly damaged vehicle.

If the water is not moving, try to assess its depth by either walking into the water or by seeing if you can see the bottom. Once you have a rough idea of the water depth, cross-check this with your vehicle's wading depth (you can find this in the owner's manual).

If you decide it is safe to cross, enter the water slowly and maintain a steady pace going through. The worst thing you can do is enter the water at speed and create a bow wave which can flood your engine and leave you stranded.

Finally – if there is a current in the water, DO NOT enter. There is a real danger you could get carried downstream.

RED Advisories

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