Winter Driving in Personal Vehicles – Ask The Expert



Does using a personal vehicle change an employer's winter driving responsibilities?

December brings icy roads, reduced visibility and pressure to finish work before the holidays. Employers should plan for these hazards whenever employees drive for work.

QUESTION

Our employees use their own vehicles to visit clients. With December snowstorms approaching, is reminding them to drive carefully enough, or should we take additional precautions?

ANSWER

A reminder alone is not enough. An employee's ownership of the vehicle does not remove the employer's responsibility to address work-related driving hazards. Establish a winter driving procedure that covers trip planning, vehicle readiness, changing conditions and emergencies. Specific legal requirements depend on your jurisdiction.

EXPLANATION

Start by asking whether each trip is necessary. A virtual appointment or postponed visit may eliminate the exposure.

When travel is necessary, assess the route, forecast, road conditions, driver readiness and available daylight. Allow extra travel time so employees are not pressured to rush between appointments.

Set clear criteria for delaying or cancelling travel, such as road closures, freezing rain or visibility that prevents safe driving. Explain whom employees should contact if conditions deteriorate and how to stop safely and obtain instructions. Reassess conditions throughout the day.

Require vehicles used for work to be suitable for winter conditions. Check tires, lights, brakes, wipers and winter washer fluid. Confirm applicable winter tire requirements. Drivers should clear snow and ice, carry an emergency kit, reduce speed and increase following distance.

For employees travelling alone or through remote areas, establish check-in times and a response procedure for missed check-ins. Employees should communicate only after parking safely. Record the trip plan, identified hazards and agreed precautions, and review incidents and near misses to improve the procedure.