



Safety Alert

How to deal with the danger of hailstones while driving

Hail Shower Phenomenon

Hail is a common occurrence and showers can lead to some of the most difficult and dangerous driving conditions we have to contend with. This is especially true on higher speed roads such as dual carriageways or motorways.

The big problem with hail showers is their unpredictable and localised nature. As a shower tracks across the country, it deposits a narrow band of hailstones on the ground. Where the track of a shower crosses a road, drivers may suddenly pass from perfectly good conditions onto a carpet of hailstones. This has the potential to catch drivers out.

Why it Happens?

Let us paint a picture to show you the risk involved. Imagine a truck, transporting a container of ball bearings, suddenly sheds its entire load onto the road. Now imagine trying to drive on that surface. That's pretty much what happens with hail.

Unlike frost and ice, salting the road will not reduce the risks. Even if the road has recently been treated with salt, this will not stop a shower from completely covering the road in those ball-bearing sized hailstones and creating a slippery and hazardous surface.

Further information can be obtained from the Road Safety Authority website <http://www.rsa.ie/>

So what should you do if you find yourself suddenly driving through a shower of hailstones?

- The first and obvious thing to do is to slow down, without braking if possible. You should warn other drivers, though, by using your hazard warning lights.
- Take care to avoid sudden steering movements or hard braking.
- Accelerate and brake very gently, and drive particularly slowly on bends, where loss of control is more likely. Brake progressively on the straight before you reach a bend. Having slowed down, steer smoothly round the bend, always avoiding sudden actions.
- Keep an eye out for road markings that may become obscured, and maintain plenty of distance from the vehicle travelling in front of you.
- To stack the odds in your favour if you find yourself driving in these conditions, make sure your tyres are fit for purpose - i.e. that they are not below the legal minimum tread depth and that they are inflated to the correct pressure. Make sure your windscreen wipers are not worn or torn and replace them if they are.

How do you reduce your chances of getting caught out by a shower of hailstones?

- Checking forecasts and listening to travel bulletins before and during your journey will alert you to any possible hail showers.
- Make sure you're using dipped headlights so you're visible to other road users.
- If you know that hail is forecast, in daylight hours be aware of the tell-tale signs of showers tracking across the sky and be prepared to follow the guidance as mentioned above.
- Driving through a shower of hailstones on the road at night can be even more of a problem because there is likely to be little if any warning. It is essential you avoid sudden braking or steering.

Being aware of the possibility of hail showers will help avoid any nasty surprises.

Remember always drive with due CARE

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