

Road-Wise Driving: Rural Roads

Secondary roads in remote and/or rural areas may present hazards that new and even experienced drivers accustomed to traveling on urban and suburban roadways may not be aware of. The following information and tips describes hazards particular to unpaved and rural roads and safety procedures to consider.

Extra caution is required when driving on "country roads" because they are often not designed for efficient high-speed travel like urban roadways. Never exceed posted speed limits and remember that some circumstances require driving well below the posted speed. Beyond exercising normal driver safety, travel on rural roads may also warrant specific additional precautions:

- Always double check directions or maps before venturing onto rough or little-used dirt roads.
- Fill fuel tank before leaving populated areas. Fuel stations may be unavailable for long distances. Carry extra fuel in an approved gas can if you will be a long way from populated areas.
- Check the air in the spare before you go. Be sure you have a jack (and know how to use it) and usable flashlight.
- Don't count on cell phone service.
- If a small animal (such as a rabbit or coyote) runs out into the road in front of you, do not try to swerve around it or slam on the brakes. Animals move rapidly and unpredictably and may be confused by any changes in your approach.
- Keep scanning the side of the roads for deer and possibly other livestock.
- When an oncoming vehicle is encountered, pull over to give adequate passing room. Watch out for steep drop offs or loose surface on the shoulder. If no safe shoulder is available at your location, stop and wait for the other vehicle to pull over.
- When there is no shoulder available for either vehicle to pull over safely, stop. One vehicle should back up until a safe spot is reached. By custom the vehicle closest to the safe shoulder will reverse or, on a steep hill, the vehicle traveling downhill may be given the right-of-way.
- Do not expect logging trucks, cars with trailers, or other large vehicles to make room for you. Pull over early when you see them coming.

- Beware of using your brakes excessively. Excessive use of brakes can result in overheating and eventual failure. Skidding may occur more easily, especially when towing.
- When descending a long or particularly steep grade, shift the vehicle into a low gear to reduce the need to use the brakes. This applies to vehicles with manual or automatic transmissions.
- Leave extra distance between your vehicle and those ahead of you to avoid dust and flying rocks. Slow down when approaching oncoming vehicles to prepare for a loss of visibility.
- Be aware of changing road surface. If you enter an area of soft sand or gravel, steer gently and avoid braking or accelerating suddenly. Remember that if you drive down a hill with a loose surface, you may have trouble climbing back up.
- Stay off of shoulders which may be less compacted than the road. Use extra caution when pulling off the road.

Driving on rural and forest roads requires a special set of skills and knowledge. Most driving today is on improved roads in suburban and urban areas. Driving on unimproved and rural roads takes practice!

A FEW MORE TIPS . . .

Rural Intersections

Depending on the time of the year, it may be difficult to see other drivers. Some rural intersections may be marked with warning signs (stop, yield, etc.), while others may not. When approaching any rural intersection, slow down and look both ways before entering the intersection. Be safe and enter all rural intersections with caution.

Curves and Skidding

Slow down before beginning the curve. Do not brake suddenly as this may cause skidding or locked wheels. If you skid, ease off the gas pedal or brakes. Steer into the direction of the skid until you feel you have regained traction and then straighten your vehicle.