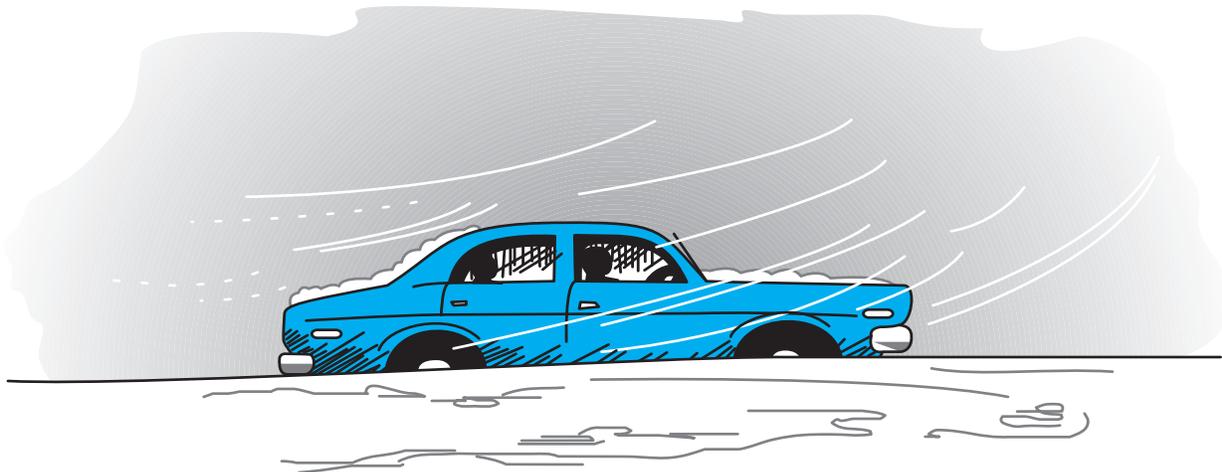


THE ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR

Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management



Prepare for safe winter travel

By Darin Langerud

It's official, winter is here: a time when things slow down and the prairie is covered in a white blanket of snow. As the days now begin to grow longer, spring won't be far off. That may sound a bit like some nostalgic reminiscing, but, as any North Dakotan knows, for every beautiful sunny winter day, around the corner can lurk winter weather that could make a penguin blush. For all of us planning travel this winter, whether it be to Grandma's house, or a high school basketball game, care should be taken to prepare for possible hazardous conditions.

The first thing anyone traveling North Dakota's highways should have with them this time of year is a winter survival kit. A well stocked kit should include a first-aid kit, non-perishable food items, a shovel, flashlight, candles and matches, a blanket or extra clothing, and booster cables. And, as in any emergency situation, a cell phone is a very handy thing to have.

Before venturing out, check the

weather forecast, not only where you are, but for where you are going. Weather and road conditions can vary dramatically over relatively short distances. It's also a good idea to let someone know where you're going, your travel route, and when you expect to arrive. Finally, keep your gas tank above half full, so you can periodically run the engine for heat if you get stranded.

It doesn't take much to create dangerous winter driving conditions. Freezing rain can quickly turn dry roadways into skating rinks and your cold rubber tires won't provide much grip. Fast-moving "Alberta Clippers" can change a beautiful day into potentially dangerous one in a matter of minutes. Heavy snow squalls and strong winds often associated with these storms can turn a leisurely winter trip into a "white-knuckler" with drifting snow and reduced visibilities. In areas with existing snow cover, the mere presence of a strong wind can induce potentially dangerous visibilities and frigid wind chills.

There are many resources available to the traveling public to assist

in planning winter travel. The recently-implemented North Dakota 511 system is specifically designed to inform travelers of road and weather conditions. To access the system just dial 511 on your telephone and follow the menu options. The user can find road condition information for North Dakota interstate and state highways in addition to site-specific weather forecasts. If your travel plans take you beyond North Dakota's borders, the 511 system is also in place in Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, and South Dakota.

It may sound elementary, but the most important resource in planning and conducting winter travel is common sense. If weather conditions are poor, postpone your plans for another time. For it's better to arrive late than not at all!

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