

The FTAI have prepared this advice guide for van drivers and fleet operators to aid them in planning for challenging driving conditions. For all severe weather events it is essential that vehicles are maintained to the highest level if they are to be operated in extreme weather conditions and drivers are suitably prepared and briefed for the task ahead.

Weather Warnings are presented in three categories.

STATUS YELLOW

Weather alert
BE AWARE

Alerts are to notify those who are at risk because of their location and/or activity, and to allow them to take preventative action. Yellow level weather alerts are for weather conditions that do not pose an immediate threat to the general population, but only to those exposed to risk by nature of their location and/or activity.

STATUS ORANGE

Weather warning
BE PREPARED

Warnings are for weather conditions which have the capacity to impact significantly on people in the affected areas. An Orange level weather warning implies that those in the affected areas should prepare themselves in an appropriate way for the anticipated conditions.

STATUS RED

Severe weather warning
TAKE ACTION

Severe weather warnings are a rare event and implies that recipients take action to protect themselves and/or their properties; this could be staying indoors; or by other specific actions aimed at mitigating the effects of the weather conditions.

Operating in Flooding and Severe Surface Water Conditions tips

VAN DRIVERS

- Ensure your vehicle is roadworthy and has sufficient fuel for your journey. Carry out the following safety checks F.L.O.W.E.R.
Fuel, Lights, Oil, Water, Electrics, Rubber
- Allow more time for your journey.
- Obtain weather information before you set off and keep up to date with changing conditions and closed routes via the radio.
- Flash floods can come rapidly and unexpectedly. In Ireland they are usually caused when rivers break their banks or water adjacent to the road spills onto it. You may not have a warning that a flash flood lies ahead.
- Never attempt to drive through a flood that you couldn't walk through and be aware that water hides dips in the road. Worse still, there may be no road at all under the water. Flooding can wash away the entire road surface and a significant amount of ground beneath.
- Heavy rain can reduce visibility dramatically – ensure your lights are on and your wipers are clearing your windscreen properly and the de-misters are effective before you set off.
- Consider other drivers - pass through flooded sections one vehicle at a time, don't drive through water against approaching vehicles.
- Two feet of flowing water can sweep away most vehicles. Don't try driving through fast-moving water, for example approaching a flooded bridge – your vehicle could easily be swept away.
- Lower your speed and keep a safe distance from other vehicles – allow at least twice as much separation distance as you would in dry conditions.
- Allow for the fact other drivers will experience visibility challenges when there is heavy rain or spray and that they may get into difficulties. They may also brake unexpectedly.
- All braking must be gentle and over much longer distances, especially when driving vehicles with heavy loads or with a trailer attached.
- Avoid any sudden braking, steering, acceleration, or unnecessary lane changes.
- If your steering feels light due to aquaplaning, ease off the accelerator and slow down gradually.
- Never attempt to drive through a flooded area, unless you are certain of the depth of the water and that conditions allow it to be done safely.
- Always check your brakes after you have driven through water.
- Take care when driving on or off gradients, on off-road sites and when getting out of the van.
- Look out for slip and trip hazards like kerbs and debris under the water.
- Manhole covers can get lifted and moved.
- Water levels can change quickly.
- Assume that flood water is contaminated!
 - Urban flood water can carry dangerous bacteria from drains and sewers that could cause disease.
 - Rural flood water is more likely to be contaminated by agricultural chemicals and animal waste.
- Make sure you keep an eye out for pedestrians and cyclists on the road as visibility is lower during bad weather conditions. Minibus drivers should also be extra cautious and slow when approaching bus-stops so as to avoid splashing passengers or forcing them to traverse surface water to board the bus.

VAN FLEET OPERATORS

- Only operate when it is safe to do so.
- Pay heed to the national weather alerts and adapt operational activity as necessary. The safety of drivers and other road users is of the highest priority.
- Are appropriate systems in place for employees who have to drive for work in adverse weather conditions?
- Do employees know how to handle vehicles in adverse weather conditions? Has this been communicated to them?
- Is there a plan in place for employees in the event of emergencies such as a collision, breakdown or getting stuck/stranded?
- Ensure you know your drivers' routes and check in regularly with them.
- Update drivers and customers regularly and be prepared to change your plan or scrap it entirely and recall your drivers if the conditions deteriorate to an unsafe level.
- Always plan for an alternative route to allow for road closures during bad weather.

USEFUL WEBSITES

<https://www.met.ie/warnings/today>

<https://www.rsa.ie/road-safety/campaigns/severe-weather>

https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Vehicles_at_Work/Driving_for_Work/Winter_Driving_Tips/