

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 Stormy/Windy 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
- Plan your journey to avoid exposed or high roads (such as motorway flyovers, bridges, etc) if possible.
- Ensure you have appropriate clothing you should prepare for delays and the possibility that you could have to spend longer in the vehicle than normal:
 - Warm jacket
 - Gloves and hat
 - Winter boots
 - Spare clothing
 - Bottles of water
 - Extra food and a flask of warm drink
 - A blanket
 - Mobile phone and charger
- Large vans or minibuses are vulnerable to losing control or tipping over in high winds especially when empty. They can also create turbulence for motorcycles and other small vehicles. Drivers should pay extra attention to the road and anticipate gusts in windy conditions.
- Maintain a safe distance from other vehicles to give yourself and other motorists time and space to avoid any debris in the road. It takes longer to stop a vehicle on wet roads so slow down and allow extra distance between you and the vehicle in front. The 2 second rule becomes the 4 second rule in bad weather and poor visibility according to the conditions.
- Turn on your headlights to make yourself more visible to other road users. Be aware of poor visibility created by driving rain.
- Watch for places where wind strength could increase, such as a gap in the trees, or after passing some form of shelter such as a bridge or large vehicle.
- If you must travel on exposed roads in high winds, be prepared for lower speed limits, lane closures and diversions.
- Always be aware of the potential for Debris on the road; branches, wheelie bins, trampolines, etc, are commonly blown onto roads during stormy conditions.
- If you must operate your vehicle, please pay attention to the following:
 - Drive at speeds that are suitable to the weather and road conditions.
 - Pull into the side of the road where safe to do so where the winds are very high and or very heavy hail or rain showers, keeping lights and hazard lights on.
 - Always ensure that the door is secured when open – the latch should be checked regularly to ensure that it is in working order.
 - Care should be taken during windy conditions to ensure that vehicle door(s) are not caught by the wind and slammed shut or blown open.
 - Heavy winds make it harder to steer and handle a vehicle, so keep a firm grip on the wheel. If you don't feel comfortable driving, pull over to a safe place until the wind dies down.
 - Make sure you keep an eye out for pedestrians and cyclists on the road as visibility is lower during bad weather conditions, and pedestrians are usually more impatient to get out of the rain. They may make quick and rash decisions when crossing the road. Minibus drivers should also be extra cautious and slow when approaching bus-stops as wet weather conditions can cause side gutters to fill up and splash passengers.

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? Have you communicated this 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. When planning a route during bad weather try to:
 - Identify the locations where there is a risk of high winds, particularly on high or exposed routes.
 - Be aware of potential localised road closures through snow gates, flood risk, landslip or other dangers.
 - Always prepare for a suitable diversion route.

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/