

December 12,
2006

"Risk WATCH"

SPECIAL
FEATURE

Office of Financial Management's Risk Management Division

WILD WHEN WET

What You Need to Know About Wet Roads and Cruise Control

The abundance of wet weather—not to mention ice and snow--we are experiencing this time of year is perfect timing for sharing this potentially *life-saving safety reminder*. The following information was passed along in an e-mail with a disclaimer that it met the authenticity test via the Urban legends web site, which you can reference at <http://www.snopes.com/autos/techno/wetroad.asp>

E-mails and stories on the website above have a common theme. That common denominator is **rain, moderate speed, and use of cruise control** (we could expect that excessive speed only worsens the danger). The combination results in **hydroplaning, with the car literally "flying through the air"**. There are numerous accident accounts where this occurred to unsuspecting drivers.

Wet-road driving is full of dangers that are not always immediately apparent. Just a **thin layer of water** lying on the pavement can send an unsuspecting **driver's car hydroplaning into another lane**—the car's wheels **skim along the water's surface instead of making contact with the road**. Also, roads constantly accumulate oily substances created by car exhaust, and this residue settles deep into the pavement. Rain brings this oil back to the surface, making roads especially slippery during that first hour of downpour or misting.

Likewise winter driving carries with it a similar set of perils. Ice, snow and sleet can make for dangerously slippery conditions, but so too can innocuous-looking slush and **all-but-invisible black ice**.

Bottom line: If you **HABITUALLY USE CRUISE CONTROL, DISCONTINUE THE PRACTICE DURING WINTER MONTHS**. The moments it takes to disengage cruise control may be moments you don't have during a spin-out.

The only way to stop wheel-spin and maintain control is to immediately reduce power. However, an activated cruise control system will continue to apply power, keeping the wheels spinning. By the time you disengage the cruise control, you may have lost control.

--Tips from Insurance Corporation of British Columbia

Jolene Bellows

Education and Safety Specialist
Office of Financial Management
Risk Management Division
PO Box 41027
Olympia, WA 98504-1027
Phone: 360-902-7312
E-Mail: jolene.bellows@ofm.wa.gov