

24 October 2007**For Immediate use****WINTER IS COMING; THINK SAFE, SAY POLICE CHIEFS**

This Sunday marks the end of the British Summer Time when clocks go back one hour and when the Scottish Police Service urges all road users to prepare for reduced daylight hours and the possibility of poor weather during the forthcoming winter.

It is a time of the year when additional safety precautions should be taken by motorists to prepare themselves and their vehicles before starting out on their journeys.

And it is the time of the year when Scotland's eight police forces, in conjunction with the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS), carry out their annual National Winter Safety Campaign – a four-day, Scotland-wide campaign focussing on promoting safer driving in adverse winter conditions from Friday, 26 October to Monday, 29 October.

“Police forces throughout the country will be highlighting various safety issues concerning drivers, cyclists and pedestrians at this time of the year,” said Superintendent Pat Docherty (Strathclyde), Chair of the National Campaigns Working Group within the ACPOS Road Policing Business Area.

“It is vitally important to make sure your vehicle is adequately maintained and serviced and that brakes, tyres, lights, batteries, windscreens and wiper blades are in good condition and that engine coolant levels are topped up and contain anti-freeze. In addition, washer bottles need to be topped up with an adequate screen wash to clear windscreens of dirt, grease and frost and ice, when it comes.

“Tyres are obviously the point of contact with the road and if they are worn or incorrectly inflated then they are much less effective making it more difficult to stop in the event of an emergency. Tyres should be inflated to the manufacturer's specification, as found in the vehicle handbook.”

Tyres should also be checked for bulges, cuts or tears which will weaken the tyre and potentially lead to a collision. The minimum legal tread depth is 1.6mm but this is the legal minimum and it must be remembered that tyres perform more efficiently with a greater depth of tread.

Motorists should remember that stopping distances are greatly increased when the roads are wet or icy and drivers should increase the distance from the vehicle in front. Anticipate changing road and traffic conditions and decelerate rather than relying solely on the brakes.

“Visibility is often reduced because of fog, rain, spray, hail and snow,” Mr. Docherty continued. “Remember to stay back from the vehicle in front and ensure that you use dipped headlights in periods of reduced visibility. Fog lights can only be used when visibility is seriously reduced to less than 100 metres but must be switched off if visibility improves.

“It is very important to ensure that you can be seen from a distance and dipped headlights should be used. The use of sidelights only may be misleading to other road users, particularly at dusk or in poor light, when they may mistakenly believe your vehicle is further away than it is and, as a consequence, what may appear to be a safe manoeuvre to them may not be.

“It is essential to ensure that windscreens and wipers are in good condition and free from any defects, particularly as a low sun makes it very difficult to see clearly and a dirty, greasy or damaged windscreen will amplify this problem,” the Superintendent added.

A few more pointers include:

- If possible, keep a pair of sunglasses in the vehicle and make sure they are readily available.
- Try and anticipate the problem of a low sun as this problem can be blinding.
- Check that wiper blades are not worn and are capable of clearing the screen correctly.
- All windows including the windscreen should be demisted and cleared of any frost, snow or ice before moving off as failure to do so can have catastrophic consequences in the event of a collision.

(This may appear obvious but many drivers fail to clear all the windows prior to driving.)

- Cyclists should ensure that they have suitable lights on their bicycles and that they wear reflective and fluorescent clothing and a cycle helmet.
- Parents of children such as those who do paper rounds should ensure that their children are given this protection, particularly as paper rounds are almost always carried out during the hours of darkness at this time of year.
- Pedestrians should ensure that they wear bright coloured clothing, particularly in rural areas where the street lighting is either non-existent or very limited.

(Numerous articles of clothing and bags carried by schoolchildren these days contain reflective and fluorescent material and enable children to be seen from distance.)

Superintendent Docherty added: “These measures are simple common sense, are easily achieved but are all too often overlooked yet only take a few seconds and will help all road users to avoid some of the dangers that this time of year can bring.

“During this and throughout the coming months, Scottish Police Officers will, if necessary, stop motorists and provide advice, give warnings and my hope is that these will be heeded. If necessary, offenders can expect to be reported, where appropriate. Some of the offences may only carry a penalty of £30, but think of the other consequences and don’t risk it.”

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Notes to editors:

Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) is an independent, professionally-led, strategic body, constituted as a company limited by guarantee, registered in Scotland (Reg. No 310956). In the public interest and in equal and active partnership with Scottish Ministers and local police authorities, ACPOS leads and co-ordinates the direction and development of a strategic policing response in Scotland.

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