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PennDOT - Statewide News

Motorists Advised to Limit Travel During Upcoming Winter Storm

Anticipated Vehicle Restrictions Will Be in Effect Wednesday

Harrisburg, PA –In preparation for a major winter storm event, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC) are advising motorists to avoid all unnecessary travel during the storm, and are anticipating that restrictions on trucks and other vehicles will be imposed on certain roadways around the state.

"We have been preparing for winter since the last one ended, and we're calling on the public to be our partners in safe travel," said PennDOT Secretary Yassmin Gramian. "Please, avoid traveling and if you must travel, be sure to check travel conditions and give plow operators plenty of space so they can do their jobs safely and effectively."

"While overall traffic on the PA Turnpike is down by about 30 percent due to the pandemic, we do know that critical commercial traffic continues during this time even during severe weather," said PA Turnpike CEO Mark Compton. "If you must travel, before heading out, be sure to download the 511PA Smartphone App for real-time, hands-free PA traffic advisories. Speed restrictions and vehicle bans will be used extensively during this storm and you will want to be fully apprised of any changes."

Effective 1:00 PM on Wednesday, December 16, PennDOT and PTC anticipate that vehicle restrictions will begin to be phased in reflecting [Level 1 of the commonwealth's weather event vehicle restriction plan](#) on the following roadways:

- All northbound and southbound miles of Route 33;
- Interstate 76 (Schuylkill Expressway) from the Pennsylvania Turnpike to Interstate 95;
- All eastbound and westbound miles of Interstate 78;
- Interstate 80 from Interstate 99 to the New Jersey border;
- All northbound and southbound miles of Interstate 81;
- All northbound and southbound miles of Interstate 83;
- All eastbound and westbound miles of Interstate 84;
- Interstate 95 from the Delaware border to the New Jersey border;
- All eastbound and westbound miles of Interstate 283;
- All northbound and southbound miles of Interstate 380;
- Interstate 476 from the Pennsylvania Turnpike to Interstate 95;
- All eastbound and westbound miles of Interstate 676;
- All northbound and southbound miles of Interstate 295;
- All eastbound and westbound miles on the Pennsylvania Turnpike from the Breezewood interchange to the New Jersey border; and

- All northbound and southbound miles on the Pennsylvania Turnpike Northeast Extension (Interstate 476) from Interstate 76 to the Clark Summit interchange.

Under Level 1 restrictions, the following vehicles are **not permitted** on affected roadways:

- Tractors without trailers;
- Tractors towing unloaded or lightly loaded enclosed trailers, open trailers or tank trailers;
- Tractors towing unloaded or lightly loaded tandem trailers;
- Enclosed cargo delivery trucks that meet the definition of a CMV;
- Passenger vehicles (cars, SUV's, pickup trucks, etc.) towing trailers;
- Recreational vehicles/motorhomes;
- School buses, commercial buses and motor coaches; and motorcycles.

Effective 4:00 PM on Wednesday, December 16, PennDOT and PTC anticipate that vehicle restrictions will begin to be phased in reflecting [Level 3 of the commonwealth's weather event vehicle restriction plan](#) will on the following roadways:

- All northbound and southbound miles of Route 33;
- All eastbound and westbound miles of Interstate 78;
- Interstate 80 from Interstate 99 to the New Jersey border;
- All northbound and southbound miles of Interstate 81;
- All northbound and southbound miles of Interstate 83;
- All eastbound and westbound miles of Interstate 84;
- All eastbound and westbound miles of Interstate 283;
- All northbound and southbound miles of Interstate 380;
- Interstate 476 from the Pennsylvania Turnpike to Interstate 95;
- All eastbound and westbound miles on the Pennsylvania Turnpike from the Breezewood interchange to the New Jersey border; and
- All northbound and southbound miles on the Pennsylvania Turnpike Northeast Extension (Interstate 476) from Interstate 76 to the Clark Summit interchange.

On roadways with Level 3 restrictions in place, **no commercial vehicles are permitted EXCEPT loaded single trailers with chains or approved Alternate Traction Devices.** Additionally, all school buses, commercial buses, motor coaches, motorcycles, RVs/motorhomes and passenger vehicles (cars, SUVs, pickup trucks, etc.) towing trailers are not permitted on affected roadways while restrictions are in place.

Speed limits would be restricted to 45 mph on these roadways for all vehicles while the vehicle restrictions are in place, and commercial vehicles not affected by the bans must move to the right lane. Additional speed restrictions on other interstates could be added depending on changing conditions.

Restrictions will be communicated via variable message boards, the 511PA traveler information website at www.511pa.com and smartphone apps. Motorists can also sign up for alerts on www.511pa.com by clicking on "Personal Alerts" in the left-hand menu.

PennDOT is urging motorists to use caution during the event and generally reduce speeds and be aware of changing weather conditions. Heavy winds and blowing/drifted snow is expected with this storm, and motorists always should be alert for sudden squalls which can strike with little or no warning and quickly cause roads to become snow covered. Heavy squalls also can cause whiteout conditions, virtually eliminating a driver's visibility.

If motorists do encounter snow squalls while traveling, PennDOT offers this advice:

- Slow down gradually and drive at a speed that suits conditions.
- Turn on your headlights.
- Stay in your lane and increase your following distance.
- Stay alert, keep looking as far ahead as possible and be patient.
- Do not drive distracted; your full attention is required.
- Use your defroster and wipers.
- Keep windows and mirrors free of snow and ice.
- During whiteouts, come to a complete stop only when you can safely pull off the roadway.
- Do not stop in the flow of traffic since this could cause a chain-reaction collision.
- Do not pass a vehicle moving slowly or speed up to get away from a vehicle that is following too closely.
- Always buckle up and never drive impaired.

Motorists are reminded that roadways will not be free of snow while precipitation is falling. With freezing temperatures, roads that look wet may actually be icy, and extra caution is needed when approaching bridges and highway ramps where ice can form without warning.

To help make decisions regarding winter travel, motorists are encouraged to "Know Before You Go" by checking conditions on more than 40,000 roadway miles, including color-coded winter conditions on 2,900 miles, by visiting www.511PA.com. 511PA, which is free and available 24 hours a day, provides traffic delay warnings, weather forecasts, traffic speed information and access to more than 1,000 traffic cameras. Users can also see plow truck statuses and travel alerts along a specific route using the "Check My Route" tool.

511PA is also available through a smartphone application for iPhone and Android devices, by calling 5-1-1, or by following regional Twitter alerts accessible on the 511PA website.

Drivers should prepare or restock their emergency kits with items such as non-perishable food, water, first-aid supplies, warm clothes, a blanket, cell phone charger and a small snow shovel. Motorists should tailor their kits to any specific needs that they or their families have such as baby supplies, extra medication and pet supplies.

When winter weather occurs, drivers should be extra cautious around operating snow-removal equipment. When encountering a plow truck, drivers should:

- Stay at least six car lengths behind an operating plow truck and remember that the main plow is wider than the truck.

- Be alert since plow trucks generally travel much more slowly than other traffic.
- When a plow truck is traveling toward you, move as far away from the center of the road as is safely possible, and remember that snow can obscure the actual snow plow width.
- Never try to pass or get between several trucks plowing side by side in a "plow train." The weight of the snow thrown from the plow can quickly cause smaller vehicles to lose control, creating a hazard for nearby vehicles.
- Never travel next to a plow truck since there are blind spots where the operator can't see, and they can occasionally be moved sideways when hitting drifts or heavy snowpack.
- Keep your lights on to help the operator better see your vehicle. Also remember that under Pennsylvania state law, vehicle lights must be on every time a vehicle's wipers are on due to inclement weather.

In addition to driving safely around plows, motorists are urged to drive according to conditions. If motorists encounter snow or ice-covered roads, they should slow down, increase their following distance and avoid distractions. Last winter in Pennsylvania, preliminary data shows that there were 151 crashes resulting in three fatalities and 81 injuries on snowy, slushy or ice-covered roadways where aggressive driving behaviors such as speeding or making careless lane changes were factors.

For more information on safe winter travel, an emergency kit checklist and information on PennDOT's winter operations including a video, visit www.PennDOT.gov/winter. Additional winter driving and other highway safety information is available at www.PennDOT.gov/safety.

Follow the conversation by using #PAWinter on Twitter at www.twitter.com/PennDOTNews and visit the department on Facebook at www.facebook.com/PennsylvaniaDepartmentofTransportation.

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