

Chapter 10: Special Driving Conditions



Special Driving Conditions

Note: Practice quizzes are available only for those sections of the manual covering rules of the road (Chapters 4 through 11 and Road Signs).

Even under the best conditions, driving requires your full attention and your best judgment. When special conditions or hazards occur, attention and judgment become even more important. To be a good and safe driver, you must learn how to drive on expressways, at night, in bad weather and when an emergency occurs.

Railroad Crossings

GRADE CROSSINGS

A grade crossing is the point at which train tracks intersect with a roadway and is considered an intersection. As you approach a crossing, always expect a train. Trains can run on any track, at any time, from either direction. Never race a train to a crossing, never drive around lowered gates, and do not stop on tracks. (You will learn later in the section what to do if your vehicle stalls or gets stuck on a track.) When crossing tracks, always stay in your lane and in the same gear.

Some grade crossings have flashing red lights or lowering gates when a train approaches (“active” grade crossings). When approaching marked, or active, grade crossings, do not proceed until the gates are completely raised and the lights are off. It is illegal and dangerous to go around lowered gates or to cross while the lights are still flashing.

Some grade crossings do not have gates or flashing lights. When approaching unmarked, or passive, grade crossings, slow down and be prepared to stop. Before you cross, be sure that a train is not coming. If you see a train coming, wait until it passes, and then cross the tracks when it is safe to do so. If there are multiple tracks, wait until you can clearly see down all sets of tracks in both directions for another approaching train before crossing.

Remember that the train you see is closer and faster-moving than you think, and be aware that trains cannot stop quickly.

Railroad Crossing Warning Sign

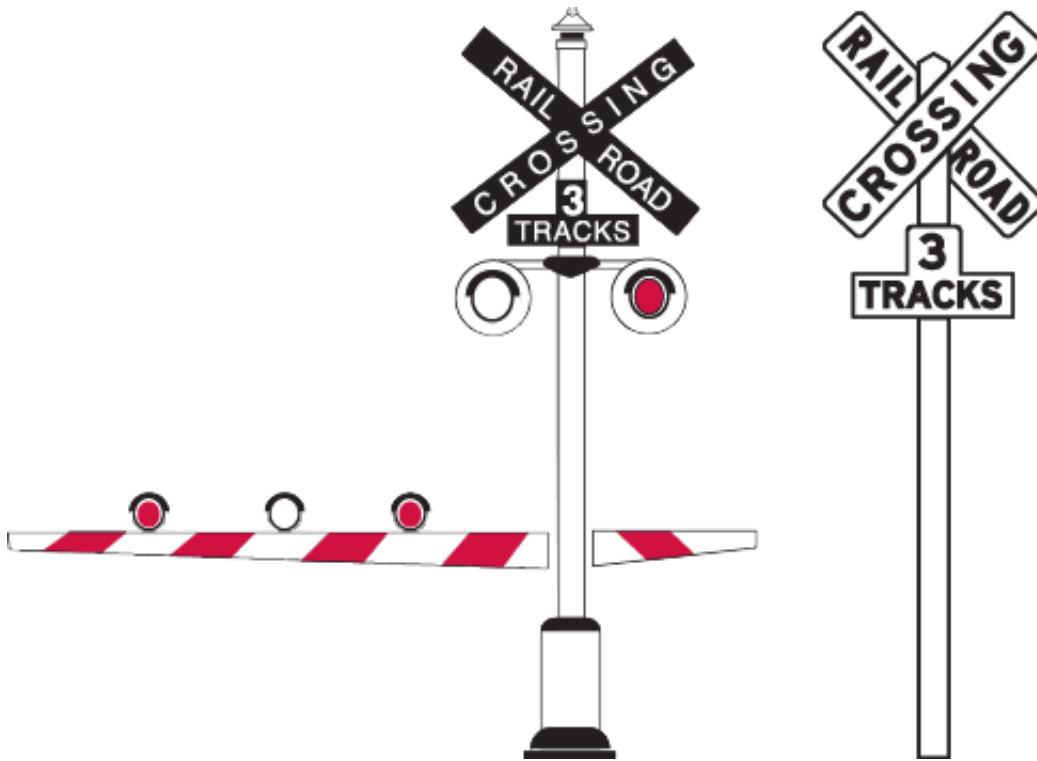


COLOR: Yellow with black letters "RR" and "X" symbol.

MEANING: There is a railroad crossing ahead. Use caution, and be prepared to stop. If you are following a bus or truck approaching a railroad crossing, be careful. Most buses and some trucks must stop at railroad crossings. (See "Railroad Crossing Signals".)

Railroad Crossing Signals

Flashing red lights, lowered crossing gates and/or a bell at a railroad crossing indicate that you must stop, at least 15 feet (5 m) from the tracks. Do not go across the tracks until the lights and bell have stopped and the crossing gates are completely up. Do not drive around or under a gate that is moving up or down.



Yield when you see a crossbuck sign, which is a sign shaped like an “X” with “RAILROAD CROSSING” printed on it. If there are multiple train tracks, the sign will show the number of tracks.

Look and listen for trains before crossing any railroad tracks. If an approaching train is near enough or going fast enough to be a danger, you cannot go across the tracks, even if they have no signals or the signals are not working.

Do not, under any circumstances, attempt to cross any railroad tracks unless you are certain your entire vehicle will clear all of the tracks at the crossing. You cannot go across any railroad tracks unless there is room for your vehicle on the other side. If other traffic prevents you from going fully across, wait and go across only when there is room.

School buses with or without passengers, other buses with passengers on board and vehicles with explosives or flammable cargo must stop at all railroad crossings. Remember those rules if you are following one of these vehicles.

Pavement Markings



Sometimes, grade crossings do not have flashing red light signals or gates. Pavement markings will often show you that a grade crossing is ahead. Stay behind the stop line while waiting for a train to pass.

Stalling on Railroad Tracks



What should you do if you stall on the tracks, for any reason?

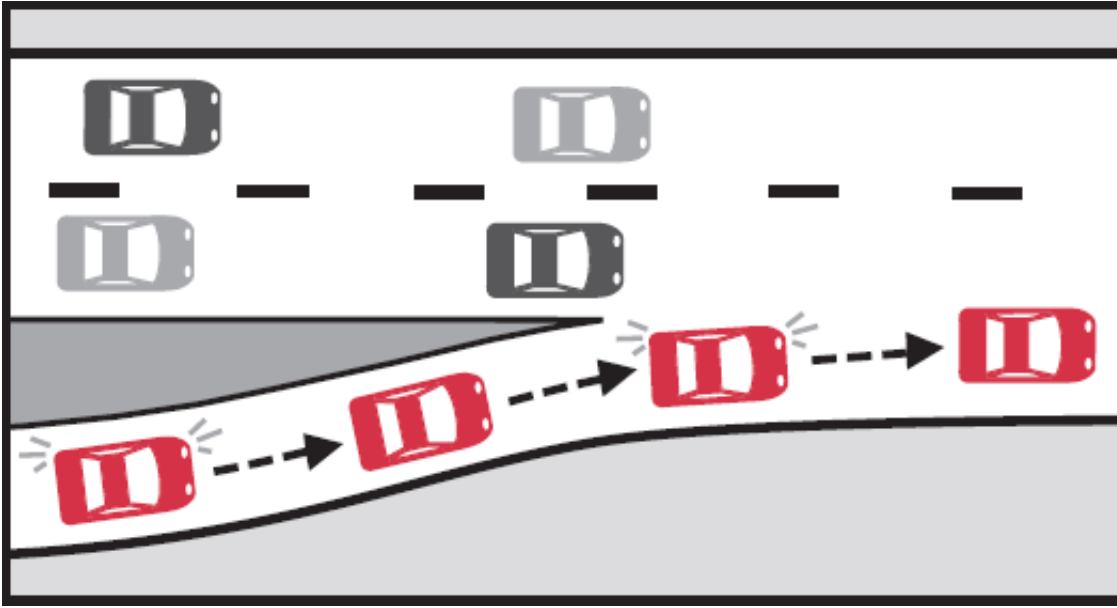
1. GET OUT! (That includes EVERYONE in the car, children, babies, an elderly passenger, etc.)
2. Get away from the tracks, even if you do not see a train.
3. Locate the Emergency Notification System sign and call the number provided, telling them about the stalled vehicle.

Run toward the general direction the train is coming from. If a train is approaching, run toward the train but away from the tracks at a 45-degree angle. If you run "down the track," in the same direction as the train, you can be hit with debris when the train hits your vehicle.

Expressway Driving

"Expressway" means any divided highway where traffic moves in one direction on two or more lanes. You normally enter or exit the expressway on ramps (controlled-access). The speed limit is normally 55 mph (88 km/h), but can be posted at 65 mph (105 km/h) in some rural areas. Examples of expressways are the New York State Thruway, major interstate routes and parkways.

Before you travel on an expressway, identify your entrance and exit points on a road map. Know where to get on and off the expressway and be prepared to get into the correct lanes for your entrance and exit. If you enter an expressway going a different direction than you intended, or at the wrong exit, stay on the expressway until the next exit. After you exit the expressway, you can figure out where you need to go and (if necessary) get back on the expressway. IT IS DANGEROUS to back up on an entrance or exit ramp, or to try to cross a median.

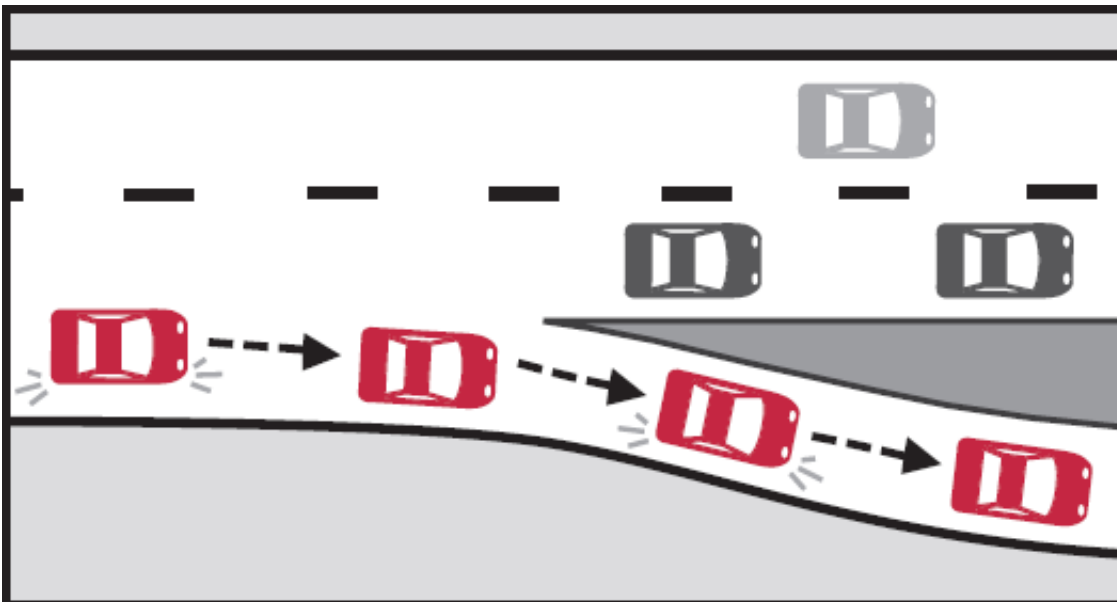


Unless there is a STOP or YIELD sign or traffic light on the entrance ramp, use the ramp to accelerate to expressway speed and blend with traffic. Signal, then look over your shoulder for traffic already on the expressway. If necessary, slow down to safely merge into traffic.

If the entrance lane is too short to allow acceleration to expressway speed, the safest method to enter is to stop and wait for a large space in traffic. Then enter the expressway and accelerate quickly. To avoid conflicts with other entrance lane traffic, stop when necessary and merge into expressway traffic as soon as possible.

As you drive on the expressway, make sure to signal all lane changes and check over your shoulder to make sure you will not cut off any vehicles behind you. Make sure your directional signal goes off after you change lanes.

Remain alert for traffic that enters ahead. If possible, move from the right lane when you approach the entrances to allow more room for traffic entering the expressway from the ramp.



To prevent a last-minute lane change, check the destination and exit signs, and get into the correct lane for your exit ahead of time. Make sure to signal your exit at least 100 feet (30 m) before you reach the exit ramp. When you are on the exit ramp, decrease your speed. There is often a lower speed limit for the ramp.

After you leave an expressway, look for speed limit signs and check your speedometer to be sure you are driving within the posted limit. You are not likely to be on a 55 mph (88 km/h) road.

Expressway driving normally combines higher speeds with heavy traffic. The higher speed and amount of traffic require you to think faster and handle your vehicle in a more efficient manner than in most other conditions. On long trips, plan frequent rest stops. On a bright day, sunglasses can reduce glare and eye fatigue.

Night Driving

About 90% of your decisions are based on what you see. At night, you must use extra caution to make up for reduced visibility. You should also know that the ability to see well at night decreases with age.

Night driving is more dangerous because the distance you can see ahead or to the side is reduced. You should drive slower than you would in daylight, especially in areas that are not known or on narrow roads with many curves. Your headlights cover about 350 feet ahead. It is important that you drive at a speed that allows you to stop safely within that distance. This is called "driving within the range" of your headlights.

The law requires you to use your headlights from one-half hour after the sun sets to one-half hour before the sun rises, when visibility is less than 1,000 feet (300 m) and when you use your windshield wipers to clear rain, snow or sleet. Turn your headlights on at dawn, dusk and in fog. Even when headlights do not help you see in low-light periods, they make it easier for other drivers and pedestrians to see your vehicle. Do not use parking lights or daytime running lights as a replacement. Headlights do a better job. If an oncoming driver flashes headlights at you during a period of low visibility, it means your vehicle was difficult to see and you should turn on your headlights.

Be considerate when you use your high beams. Your headlights must be on low beam when you are within 500 feet (150 m) of an oncoming vehicle or within 200 feet (60 m) of a vehicle ahead of you, even if the vehicle ahead is in a different lane. You should also dim your lights for pedestrians who approach you. Any fog or driving lights your vehicle has must be arranged, adjusted or operated to avoid dangerous glare to other drivers.

If an approaching driver does not dim the headlights, flash your headlights to high beam for a second, then return to low beam. To help avoid the glare of approaching high beams, move your eyes to the right. Use the road edge as a guide until the approaching vehicle passes by.

To reduce glare from the lights of following vehicles, switch your inside rear-view mirror to the "night" position.

Light from inside your vehicle or from streetlights makes it harder for you to see the road ahead. Keep the interior roof light off and dim the dashboard lights. Adjust your visors to reduce glare from lights from above.

A dirty windshield increases glare from approaching headlights. Make sure your lights and windshield glass

are clean for night driving.

Driving in Rain, Fog, or Snow

A bit of rain, snow or ice makes roads slippery. Wet leaves can be slippery and hazardous. Reduced speed and increased following distance improve your safety under these conditions (see [Chapter 8](#)). Take additional care on curves, turns and expressway ramps.

In heavy rain, your tires can begin to ride on the water that is on top of the road pavement. This is called "hydroplaning" and can cause complete loss of traction and control of steering. Hydroplaning normally occurs at higher speeds, but it also can occur if your tires are tread worn or not inflated properly. When there is heavy rain, it always makes sense to drive more slowly. If your vehicle begins to lose traction, decrease your speed even more. Good tires with deep tread help to prevent hydroplaning.

Rain, fog or snow make it harder to see through your windshield, and difficult for other drivers to see you. New York State law requires you to turn on your headlights when the weather conditions require the use of windshield wipers to clear rain, snow, sleet or fog. "Daytime running lights" do not qualify as headlights.

Headlights on high beams reflect rain, fog and snow as it falls. This makes it even harder for you to see. For better visibility during these weather conditions, keep your headlights on low beam. Reduce your speed. Signal your turns further ahead of time to give other drivers and roadway users more warning. Brake early when you decrease speed behind another vehicle or come to an intersection stop.

Some vehicles have front fog lights or front and back fog lights, for use when heavy fog or similar hazardous weather conditions restrict visibility. In New York State, all fog lights must be correctly installed and of a type approved by the Commissioner of DMV. Front fog lights can be amber or white in color. Back fog lights must be red and can be larger than the normal back lights - they will give advance warning of the presence of your vehicle to the drivers behind you. When visibility improves, you can switch off your fog lights to reduce the glare that can bother other drivers.

How to Drive in Winter

Winter is the most difficult season in which to drive. In addition to snow and ice on the roads, there are fewer hours of daylight.

Before winter weather arrives, make sure your vehicle is in good condition.

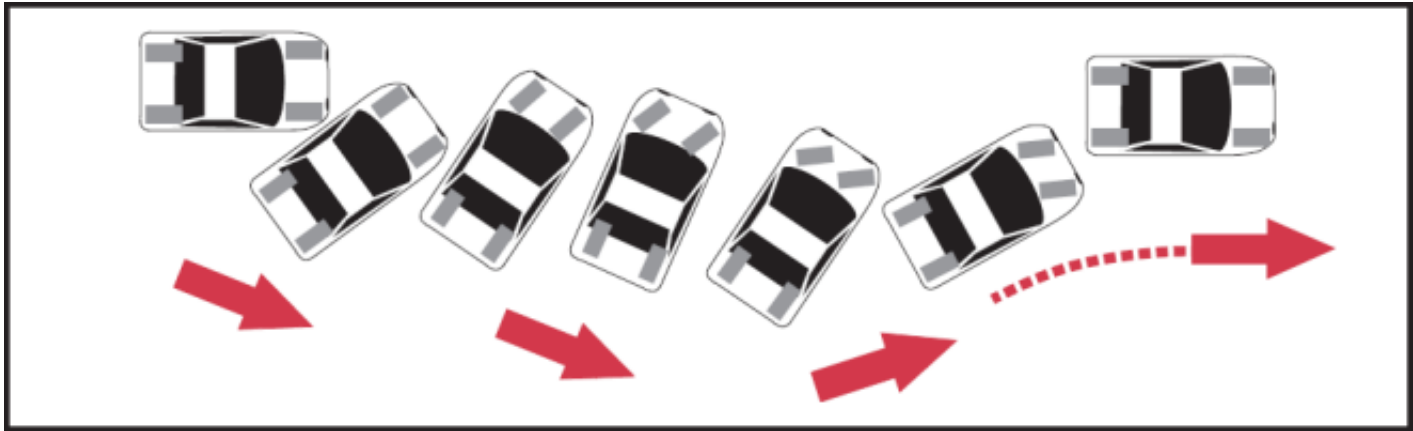
Make sure your vehicle has good snow tires. Put them on the vehicle before the first storm. Never combine radial and non-radial tires on the same vehicle. Tires with metal studs can be used in New York State only from October 16 through April 30.

During ice or snow storms, do not drive unless you must. If you must drive, first clear the ice and snow from your vehicle. This includes the headlights and back lights, the windshield wipers, the hood and roof of your vehicle, and all of the windows. Make sure the windshield washer reservoir is filled with a cleaning solution that resists freezing.

Drive slowly. Even if your vehicle has good traction in ice and snow, other drivers will travel with caution. Do not break the flow of traffic by driving faster than other vehicles.

In a rear-wheel drive vehicle, you can normally feel a loss of traction or the start of a slide. With a front-wheel drive vehicle, there might not be a warning. Although front-wheel drive and four-wheel drive vehicles normally handle better in ice and snow, they do not have flawless traction; skids can occur without a warning. Do not let the ability to better handle a front-wheel or four-wheel vehicle make you drive faster than the conditions dictate.

The best method to recover from a skid is the same for all vehicles.



If your rear wheels start to skid:

- Turn the steering wheel in the direction the vehicle is trying to go. If your rear wheels slide left, steer left. If they slide right, steer right.
- If your rear wheels start to slide in the other direction as you recover, turn the steering wheel toward that side. You might have to turn the wheel left and right several times to get your vehicle completely controlled.
- If your vehicle has anti-lock brakes (ABS), keep your foot with even pressure on the brake pedal. If your vehicle does not have ABS, pump the pedal carefully. Pump more rapidly only as your car slows down. If you brake hard with regular brakes, it will make the situation worse.

If your front wheels skid:

- Take your foot off the gas and shift to neutral or push in the clutch, but do not try to immediately steer.
- As the wheels skid sideways, they will slow the vehicle and traction will return. As traction returns, turn the wheel in the direction you want to go. Then put the transmission in "drive" or release the clutch and accelerate carefully.

To prevent skids on snow and ice, brake early, carefully and gently. "Press" your brakes in slow, steady strokes. Allow the wheels to keep turning. If they begin to lock up, decrease pressure on the brake pedal. As your vehicle decreases speed, you can also shift into a lower gear.

When sleet, freezing rain or snow begin to fall, remember that bridges, ramps and overpasses will freeze first.

Also know that slippery spots may remain after road workers have removed the snow.

How to Avoid Collisions with Deer

Two-thirds of all deer-vehicle collisions occur during the months of October, November and December. This is also the time when deer breed and when they travel the most. Daily deer activity is highest at dawn and dusk, which often is the highest time of travel for motor-vehicle commuters. Deer travel in groups - if you see one, expect more. Areas where there have been many deer-vehicle collisions often are marked with deer crossing signs. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation recommends these precautions motorists can take to reduce the chance of a deer hit:

- Be careful when you drive at dawn and dusk; this is when driver visibility is bad and the deer are most active.
- The risk of deer-vehicle collisions increases when deer movements increase during breeding season in October, November and December.
- Decrease speed when you approach deer near roadsides. Deer can "bolt" or change direction at the last minute.
- If you see a deer go across the road, decrease speed and be careful. Deer travel in groups, expect other deer to follow.
- Use emergency lights or flash your headlights to warn other drivers when deer are seen on or near the road.
- Use caution on roadways marked with deer crossing signs. These signs are put in areas that have had a large number of deer-vehicle collisions.

Driving Emergencies

The most important rule in any emergency is do not panic. You have a better chance in an emergency if you do not let fear take over. In most emergencies, you will have a second or two to think before you act.

Here is what to do in different emergency situations:

TIRE BLOWOUT - A thumping sound can be a warning that a blowout is about to occur. If you hear it, get safely off the road and check your tires. If a tire blows out, hold the steering wheel tightly and slowly take your foot off the gas pedal. If your vehicle skids, handle it as you would on ice or snow. Do not use your brake until your vehicle is controlled. Leave the road when it is safe to do so.

LOSS OF A WHEEL - Handle this as you would a blowout. A thump or noise in the wheel can be a warning sound. Leave the roadway and stop. Then check your vehicle or have it checked.

STEERING FAILURE - If your vehicle suddenly will not respond when you steer, slowly take your foot off the gas pedal, turn on your emergency lights and keep your foot off the brake pedal while it is safe to do so. The balance of the vehicle will allow it to continue going straight, but a sudden change in speed could send it out of control. As the vehicle decreases speed, you can brake very carefully to bring it to a stop..

BRAKE FAILURE - If your brake pedal suddenly goes to the floor, try pumping it to increase pressure. If that does not help, use your emergency or parking brake if you can apply it gradually- use it gently. If you shift to a lower gear, it will help your vehicle decrease speed.

HEADLIGHT FAILURE - If your headlights suddenly go out, try your emergency lights, parking lights and directional signals. These may continue to work and can give you enough light to leave the roadway safely. If your headlights begin to dim, drive to a service station or pull off the road and go for help.

STUCK GAS PEDAL - Hook your shoe under the pedal and see if you can free it. If not, shift into neutral and use the brake to slow your vehicle and get off the road. Do not turn off the ignition as you could lose your steering control or lock your steering wheel.

RUNNING OFF THE PAVEMENT - If your wheels move off the pavement, do not suddenly steer or swerve back onto the pavement. Ease your foot off the gas pedal and brake gently. When your vehicle has decreased speed, check for traffic behind you, then turn carefully back onto the pavement.

VEHICLE APPROACHING HEAD-ON IN YOUR LANE - Decrease speed, pull over to the right and sound your horn to warn the other driver. Do not turn into the left lane. If you do, the other driver may suddenly recover and pull back into that lane, causing a head-on collision.

STALLING ON RAILROAD TRACKS - If a train approaches, release your seat belt, leave the vehicle and get as far away as you can from the tracks. Run toward the general direction the train is coming from. If you run "down the track" in the same direction as the train, you can be hit with debris when the train hits your vehicle. When you are completely sure no trains are coming, open your window to listen for a train and try to start the engine. If that fails, shift your vehicle into neutral and push it from the tracks.

GOING INTO WATER - A vehicle will normally float for a while, and you should have time to remove yourself before it starts to sink. Release your seat belt and escape through a window. An open door would cause water to rush in and the car could turn over on top of you.

If the vehicle sinks before you can remove yourself, get into the back seat. An air pocket can form there as the weight of the engine pulls the vehicle down front first. When the vehicle settles, take a breath and escape through a window. When you rise air pressure will build in your lungs. Let it out in small breaths through your nose or lips as you surface. Do not hold your breath tight or try to blow air out; just allow the air to escape in a natural way.

FIRE - If you see smoke come from under the hood, pull off the road and park your vehicle. Turn off the ignition. Get away from the car and call the fire department. It is dangerous to try to fight the fire yourself.

BLOCKED VISION - If your hood opens suddenly or your vision through the windshield becomes blocked by some other object or wipers that have failed, you can open the side window so you can see. Turn on your emergency lights and carefully pull your vehicle off the road and park it.

Questions

Before you go on to Chapter 11, make sure you can answer these questions:

- What should you do if you miss an expressway exit?
- What are expressway entrance ramps used for?
- What should you do if an entrance ramp is short?
- When should you signal that you are exiting an expressway?
- What should you check for when you leave an expressway?
- Why is expressway driving different from normal driving?
- What is the main reason night driving is more difficult than daytime driving?
- Driving within the range of your headlights indicates you can stop your vehicle within about how many feet?
- What should you do if you are blinded by headlights on an approaching vehicle?
- Is it best to keep your headlights on high beam or low beam when there is fog, rain or falling snow?
- Which direction should you turn your steering wheel to get out of a skid?
- How should you use your brake pedal on a slippery road?
- What is the most important rule to remember in any emergency?
- What should you do if one of your tires blows out?
- What is the first thing you should do if your brakes fail?
- What should you do if your wheels move off the pavement?

[Chapter 10 Quiz](#)