



A **positive** approach to safe driving that enables you to translate the information you see, hear, and feel while driving into informed, decisive **actions**.

Skidding

Driving a skidding vehicle can be terrifying. The driver often feels helpless, wondering how, when, and where the skid will end. The truth is, drivers are not completely helpless when it comes to skids. Many skids can be avoided by following the principles of Decision Driving, which will keep you alert to skid-producing conditions. Even if your vehicle has already begun to skid, there are positive steps you can take to regain control.

What causes skidding? Slips, slides, and skids result when some or all of your wheels lose friction with the road surface. They are no longer gripping the road, but skating over it. Many conditions can cause skidding. Rain or mist can produce a film of water that covers the road. Sleet, snow, and ice can coat the road and prevent wheel contact. Loose sand or gravel, even wet leaves on the road, can cause loss of traction.

If you encounter such conditions, taking the following precautions will help you avoid a dangerous skid:

- Reduce your speed to well below the posted speed limit. The slower you drive the more grip you'll have between your tires and the road surface.
- Select the proper gear before going up or down a hill.
- Slow down well in advance when approaching other vehicles, intersections, curves, or railroad crossings.
- If you don't have anti-lock brakes, utilize a stab braking technique. Panic braking with conventional brakes can result in wheel lockup and put you into a skid. With ABS (see later note) make a hard, steady application of the brakes.
- On icy or snow-packed roads, be sure you have the appropriate tires, and use tire chains or studded tires where permitted by law.

Correcting a Skid

Three basic kinds of skids are: front-wheel skids, rear-wheel skids, and all-wheel skids. Another condition often involved in skidding is hydroplaning. Each type of skid has different characteristics, and requires different corrective techniques.

Two basic techniques are typically used to regain control in a skid, **stab braking** and/or **counter-steering**.

Stab braking can help drivers regain control in any straight-line skid. The technique involves quickly stabbing or pumping your foot on and off the brakes. This action causes the wheels to rapidly switch back and forth between locking (skidding) and rolling. During the brief periods of skidding, the brakes are slowing the vehicle down, and during the periods of rolling, the driver regains steering control.

Note: If your vehicle is equipped with an anti-lock braking system (ABS), you should never use stab braking. Instead, depress the brake pedal firmly and hold it – the ABS does the stabbing for you. Skids are less likely in ABS-equipped vehicles because the wheels don't lock up, but more importantly you retain the ability to steer.

Counter-steering involves keeping the front wheels pointed in the direction you want the vehicle to travel. It usually involves several quick

maneuvers to adjust and readjust the vehicle's direction during a skid.

Front-Wheel Skids

If the front wheels lock up or lose their grip on the road, you enter a front-wheel skid. This type of skid often results when the front wheel brakes are out of adjustment and the driver brakes hard. In a front-wheel skid, you lose steering control. You can attempt to steer in any direction, but the vehicle will continue straight ahead.

To correct a front-wheel skid – Stay off the brakes and the gas pedal until the wheels reestablish rolling friction. Then, begin stab braking to slow down and regain control. For ABS equipped vehicles, remember to press the brake pedal firmly without stabbing.

Rear-Wheel Skids

When the back tires lose their grip, your vehicle enters a rear-wheel skid. This type of skid occurs when the rear wheels become locked, or when too much power is applied, causing the rear wheels to spin and lose friction with the surface. If you experience a full rear-wheel skid, the vehicle will spin a half-circle and continue moving in the same direction you were originally traveling – but the vehicle will be facing the wrong direction!

To correct a rear-wheel skid – Stay off the gas, stay off the brakes until steering control is regained, and counter-steer. If the back of the vehicle starts to swing out, steer in the direction you want the front of the vehicle to go. You want to keep the vehicle aimed toward the center of the lane in which you want to be traveling. It may take several quick counter-steering maneuvers to get back on track. Once you regain steering control, use stab braking to safely slow down or stop. For

ABS equipped vehicles, remember to depress the brake pedal firmly, without stabbing.

All-Wheel Skid

When you jam on your brakes, all four wheels may lock, resulting in an all-wheel skid. The vehicle can then slide unpredictably in any direction.

To correct an all-wheel skid – Stab the brakes and counter-steer. For ABS equipped vehicles, remember to depress the brake pedal firmly without stabbing.

Hydroplaning

At speeds up to 35 mph (56 kph), tires can push water off the road surface much as a windshield wiper clears the windshield. However, as the vehicle's speed increases past that point, the tires begin to lose their ability to move the water away. The tires start to ride on a film of water – a condition called hydroplaning. The amount of hydroplaning increases as speed increases. At 55 mph (88 kph) the tires can lift completely off the road and onto the water, resulting in a complete lack of traction.

To correct hydroplaning – Take your foot off the accelerator and let the vehicle slow down on its own. If you skid while partially hydroplaning, take the appropriate steps to correct for the type of skid that occurs. For ABS equipped vehicles, remember to depress the brake firmly without stabbing.

The ability to control a skid is the mark of a skillful driver. But it's always better to prevent a skid in the first place. Sticking to the principles of Decision Driving will keep you aware of your driving environment, and better able to stay in control.

