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Winter driving: Get a grip!

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Paul Simon's hit song "Slip Slidin' Away" worked for music, but it's not something you want to experience when driving in winter weather.

"Winter driving threats include black ice, snow, slush or any type or combination of precipitation that gathers on roadways," said Lt. Col. Joseph Harvey, director, Driving Directorate, U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center. "Motorists must be prepared to understand and identify the threats and adjust accordingly."

According to the Federal Highway Administration, for the years 2001-2012 an average of 17 percent of vehicle accidents occurred during snow or sleet conditions, 12 percent occurred on icy pavement, and 14 percent happened on snowy or slushy pavement. Statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration show nearly 6,300 Americans die annually in winter-related traffic accidents.

While each condition provides its own set of hazards, black ice adds stealth to the threat.

The National Weather Service describes black ice as "patchy ice on roadways or other transportation surfaces that cannot easily be seen."

"Black ice allows asphalt or the surface below it to be seen through it," Harvey said. "It's especially hazardous at night because you have even less of a chance to see it and may be on it before you realize it."

Snow, freezing precipitation and black ice are dangerous driving conditions day or night, but properly maintaining your vehicle reduces your risk.

"It's important that motorists take precautionary measures for winter driving conditions to ensure all vehicles are in optimal driving condition and properly equipped, especially in inclement weather," said David Friedman, deputy administrator, NHTSA. "In particular, owners should take their vehicles in for a tuneup and conduct routine maintenance, ensuring tires are in top shape and windshield wipers and defrosters work properly."

For additional information on winter driving safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil/>.