Hydroplaning Basics

What is Hydroplaning?

The term hydroplaning is commonly used to refer to the skidding or sliding of a vehicle's tires across a wet surface. Hydroplaning occurs when a tire encounters more water than it can scatter. Water pressure in the front of the wheel pushes water under the tire, and the tire is then separated from the road surface by a thin film of water and loses traction. The result is loss of steering, braking and power control.

Rubber tires have tread (grooves) that are designed to channel water from beneath the tire. This creates higher friction with the road surface and can help prevent or minimize instances of hydroplaning.

When does Hydroplaning Occur?

Hydroplaning can occur on any wet road surface, however, the first 10 minutes of a light rain can be the most dangerous.

When light rain mixes with oil residue on the road surface, it creates slippery conditions that can cause vehicles, especially those traveling speeds in excess of 35 mph, to hydroplane. This can be a deadly combination for the driver and surrounding motorists.

The chance of being involved in a motor vehicle accident increases during poor weather conditions such as fog, rain, ice and snow. However, it isn't necessarily the pounding rain and blinding snow that are the most dangerous; it is the slick conditions that drivers aren't prepared for.

How do I Avoid Hydroplaning?

1. Keep your tires properly inflated.
2. Rotate and replace tires when necessary.
3. Slow down when roads are wet: the faster you drive, the harder it is for your tires to scatter the water.
4. Stay away from puddles and standing water.
5. Avoid driving in outer lanes where water tends to accumulate.
6. Try to drive in the tire tracks left by the cars in front of you.
7. Turn off cruise control.
8. Drive in a lower gear.
9. Avoid hard braking.
10. Try not to make sharp or quick turns.

Remember: "No task is so important that it be done at the risk of Safety."