

Instructor Notes: Many people find fog beautiful, but no one can deny it is a visibility hazard and can be very dangerous at times, especially if you drive for a living. Driving in heavy fog is like driving blindfolded and has caused a high number of crashes and roadway fatalities. Use this opportunity to discuss the dangers of driving in fog and how your towing operators can protect themselves and their fellow motorists.

Safety Meeting 2015 #12 – Driving in Fog

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What Is Fog?

According to the American Meteorological Society, fog is a collection of water droplets suspended in the air near the earth's surface that affect visibility. While it is believed that fog is simply a cloud at ground level, the processes forming it are very different from those that form clouds. The most common form of fog, known as radiation fog, typically occurs on clear nights as the Earth's surface cools the moist air immediately above it. Radiation fog is most common in the fall and early winter, when long nights cool the evening air, and land and water surfaces that have warmed up during the summer are still evaporating a lot of water into the atmosphere.

Fog is most common in the Appalachian area, parts of New England and a large part of the Pacific Northwest, where they typically see at least 40 days of dense fog a year. In contrast, drivers in the desert areas of the Southwest generally only see a few days of fog per year. Mist is often mistaken for fog and with good reason. The only difference between the two is their ability to obscure your visibility. If the visibility is less than one kilometer, just over a 1/2 mile, the phenomenon is termed fog, otherwise it is mist.

How Dangerous Is Fog?

Large traffic crashes attributed to fog happen every day – all over the globe. In April (2015), dense fog was blamed for causing a 60-car pile-up on I-80 in Wyoming. Many people were injured and two people died as a result of the multiple crashes. As you

can imagine, heavy fog is dangerous and can be defined as visibility below one-quarter of a mile. A “Dense Fog Advisory” means that fog has reduced visibility to one-quarter mile or less within the advisory area. If you hear this warning, be careful.

If You Must Drive in Fog, Follow These Safety Tips

- Fog is usually worse in the morning hours. If you can, plan your drive accordingly.

- Slow down and don't drive faster than your vision will allow. Most fog-related traffic fatalities occur because someone was driving too fast and couldn't stop in time to avoid a collision.

- Turn off your cruise control when driving in fog.

- Be ready for emergency stops by cars and other trucks. Limit your distractions including turning your radio down and listen for vehicles you can't see.

- Do not change lanes or pass other vehicles unless absolutely necessary.

- Watch for slow-moving vehicles and vehicles parked on the roadside.

- Use the right edge of the road (“fog line”) as a guide rather than the centerline to avoid running into oncoming traffic or being distracted by their headlights.

- Be cautious, fog can become thicker without warning and without being noticed until it's too late to react.

- Increase your following distance between you and the vehicle in front of you to ensure you have enough reaction time.

- Turn on your hazards or four-way flashers to give vehicles approaching from behind a better opportunity to see your vehicle.

- Use windshield wipers and defrosters to limit excess moisture on the windshield.

- If possible, try to drive in a “pocket,” where there are no other vehicles around you.

- Use the low-beam headlights. The visibility in front of you will sharply decrease in a fog, so use the vehicle's low-beam lights (if the vehicle does not have fog lights or driving lights). Heavy fog conditions prohibit use of high beam headlights because the light from high beams will be reflected back by thick fog. As fog thins, high beams can become more effective. Check periodically to see if the fog has thinned enough to make effective use of high beams.

- Use your fog lights (if equipped). Fog lights differ from headlamps mainly in the way they project the light. The beam of light created by fog lights is usually a wide and flat pattern – flat to stay close to the road surface and minimize reflection back by fog, and wide to better illuminate the sides of the roadway (guard rails, curbs, lines painted on the roadway, etc.).

Know When to Stop

If you absolutely cannot see or feel unsafe driving on the road in fog, pull off the road and wait until the fogs lift. It is up to you to use your best judgment. Unless totally necessary, do not park on the side of the road. Pull completely off the road preferably in a parking lot or rest area. Remember to practice safety. Don't learn it by accident.