‘Fost and Frog’? Take care on those wintry roads…

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Carefully lift your screen wipers away from the iced-up glass BEFORE turning on the wipers… see text.

Frost and fog – either can be lethal; together they make a dreadfully dangerous combination.

Kim Henson advises driving with extra special care when visibility is poor and temperatures are low at the same time, as is happening right now in Britain…

Yesterday evening I was obliged to make a short car journey in town, to get home, and the road conditions were awful, with thick fog reducing visibility and the added difficulty of the fog freezing, with ice on the road surface as well as in the air. Out in country districts it is often colder and the situation can be far worse than in urban environments…

During the few miles I had to drive, I was appalled by the numbers of vehicles being driven too fast for the conditions, with incorrect and even no lights on (!), and with vehicles following each other bumper-to-bumper, not to mention unlit bicycles and pedestrians in the road, wearing dark-coloured clothes. All of these are accidents waiting to happen…

The following few tips may help you avoid problems:

1. Think carefully before you drive at all. Is your journey by car really necessary or could you make it wait until conditions improve?
2. If you really do need to use your car, make sure that ALL the lights are working as they should, and that the front and rear windscreens, as well as the side windows, are clear of frost. If you have the chance, for about 20 minutes in advance of your journey, place a fan heater inside your car and run the heater on a low to medium setting (making sure that it is not covered and that the heat cannot harm nearby upholstery etc.). This will help to clear the screens.
3. If you have no fan heater or cannot get the vehicle close enough to mains power, you will need to use de-icer spray plus a good quality scraper, failing which an old plastic card can be used in an emergency, to clear the ice. Bear in mind that in freezing fog conditions the ice will try to re-form very rapidly on the screens and side windows…
4. If you are able to stay with the vehicle, having first made sure that the screen wipers are turned OFF (please see No. 5) get the engine started and allow it to run for several minutes, wind up the heating system to ‘max heat’ and set the direction of the airflow vents towards the screens. (Yes I know this isn’t good for fuel consumption but it’s better to use a little

more fuel and NOT run into things/people due to iced up screens…). Switching on the air conditioning may help to remove moisture from the air in the cabin, once the temperature lifts. DO NOT leave the engine running with the vehicle unattended, even in your own driveway. This is an open invitation for opportunistic thieves to take advantage of your gift to them of your vehicle to drive away…

5. Before attempting to switch on the windscreen wipers, GENTLY attempt to lift/separate the wipers from the screen, by hand. If the rubbers are frozen to the screen, operating the wipers will very likely tear the rubber blades and, worse still, may result in stripping the drive splines on the wiper arms, and/or burning out the windscreen wiper motor. Yes, I have accidentally done this myself in the past…
6. When you finish using the car for the day, ensure that the wipers are switched OFF, to avoid the problems just mentioned in No. 5.
7. Before driving away, make sure that your lamps are turned on and operational. In fog, switch on your car's fog lamps, front and rear, BUT make sure that as soon as conditions improve, they are switched off again. Fog lamps are intended to make your car more visible to other road users in poor visibility situations BUT if the fog clears they can dangerously dazzle other drivers and in fact their use in clear visibility conditions is illegal. Not many drivers seem to know this, since fog lamps are often used purely as a 'fashion' or 'style' accessory today…
8. In thick fog, concentrate hard when driving. Look out for helpful signs such as cats' eyes and white lines, but don't be mesmerised by them, and you need to be aware that a halted or slow vehicle up ahead could catch you unawares.
9. Although it may be tempting, don't follow other vehicles very closely; allow extra space between you and the one in front, especially if the road surfaces are slippery.
10. Drive at speeds appropriate to the conditions, and allow extra time for your journeys; always listen to/check online local weather forecasts before you set out – and take heed of dodgy conditions being mentioned.
11. If you are a cyclist, fit good quality and legal lamps to your bike, AND USE THEM!!!
12. As a pedestrian, wear bright/reflective clothing. When driving, carry reflective vests INSIDE the vehicle for the driver and all passengers, so that if you should have to exit the vehicle, at least other road users have a better chance of seeing you.

STAY SAFE! Far better to get there a little later than not at all...