

December 28, 2020

Snowy, Icy Roads Hold Danger

Invisible danger: Black ice. Beware!

Black ice, also called glare ice or clear ice, is a thin layer of ice on the roadway. Any ice is dangerous to drive on, but black ice is particularly hazardous because the road looks wet, not icy. Black ice isn't really black; it's so thin and transparent that the darker pavement shows through. It often has a matte appearance rather than the expected gloss.

Ice on the road prevents tires from gripping, so steering is difficult and stopping is harder.



Black ice is most common at night and very early in the morning, when temperatures are typically at their lowest. It is usually thin enough that it melts soon after sunlight hits it; however, it can last much longer on shaded areas of roadways. Bridges and overpasses are danger spots. Since they do not receive as much heat from the ground and lose more heat to the air, they can drop below freezing even when the rest of the roadway doesn't. Ice forms on the road when the road surface temperature drops below freezing. The ground cools more slowly than the air and warms back more slowly as well, so even if the air temperature is above freezing, the roadway may still be frozen. This discrepancy between temperatures can lull drivers into a false sense of security: they hear the temperature on the morning news and think all's well, when the road is still frozen.