



Monsoon Safety

Typically, Arizona monsoon storms start with heavy winds sometimes resulting in a visible wall of dust hundreds of feet high moving across the desert. These dust storms are normally accompanied by frequent thunder and lightning which often leading to heavy downpours.

When such high volume rains descend, the ground and most especially the surface streets begin to flood. Most roads are not built to drain water quickly since these rainstorms are somewhat rare. Quite often, the rain pools on streets during and for a few hours after the monsoon storms causing dangerous driving conditions.

If you're driving when it's still raining, remember to slow down. Bear in mind that the beginning of rainstorms is the most dangerous times since that's when oils and other automotive fluids are being washed off the roads causing unusually slick conditions. If your visibility is impeded by heavy rain or blowing dust, slowly pull off to the side of the road as far to the right as possible, turn off your car, turn off your lights, and keep your foot off the brake pedal. Otherwise, drivers may come up quickly behind you assuming that you're still in motion.

The worst areas for flooding are the many washes in the area and small gullies where heavy rains drained off the land long before the roads were built. This is where drivers will normally encounter signs cautioning against crossing the road when flooded. Those signs should be heeded carefully. Even if the water rushing across the road looks only an inch or two deep, it may very well be so deep that vehicles, including high clearance trucks, stall and get stuck in the wash.

Never drive into a flooded wash. The water can be deeper than you think. The pavement below the water can be eaten away by the rushing water causing your vehicle to become stuck in the mud. Additionally, there can be large objects floating down from upstream that can damage or encapsulate your vehicle. If the water is deep it may cause your motor to stall immediately and leave you stranded in the middle of the wash. If you are caught in a wash, try to climb out on the roof of your vehicle and wait for help. Use your cell phone if available to call 911.

Drexel Heights Firefighters have been trained for swift water rescues and are called in to rescue motorists stuck in washes. Television news crews usually try to capture the rescue on videotape to be broadcast, sometimes live, as a warning to others. That's only the beginning of the embarrassment trapped drivers face. In Arizona, under the "Stupid Motorist Law", these drivers can be charged for the cost of being rescued if they fail to observe posted warnings. So remember to avoid flooding areas and obey the street flood warning signs.

It is also important to keep in mind that it is not safe to walk through washes that are flowing. If the rain has fallen upstream you could get trapped in a flash flood and be taken down stream by the rushing water. This could result in being entangled in debris and cause serious harm or even death. Firefighters are prepared for swift water rescues. However, a successful monsoon season is when their services are not required.

Lightning is another threat during the monsoon season. To avoid being struck by lightning stay away from open fields, high land, trees, poles, other tall objects, standing bodies of water including swimming pools, and metal objects including golf clubs and lawn chairs. Stay off any kind of phone to avoid a shock caused by nearby lightning strikes. In an emergency, cellular phones are the best choice. Stay away from plumbing fixtures including showers, baths, and sinks as lightning can travel through metal pipes.

Remember to turn off all unnecessary electrical equipment during storms to decrease the draw on power companies. This is a prime time for power outages in the area. Because of the risk of power failure, keep batteries, a working battery-powered radio or television, and flashlights handy. If the power goes out, remember to keep lit candles out of direct drafts.

So enjoy the beautiful light show that the monsoon season brings from the safety of your home. If possible, avoid getting caught in the monsoon storms outside or in your vehicle. If you do get caught in a storm, try to stay calm and remember the safety tips mentioned here.