



Pennsylvania
Department of Transportation



Pennsylvania
State Police



Pennsylvania
Emergency Management Agency



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Shapiro Administration Investments Make Travel Safer, Prepare Pennsylvanians for Winter Weather

Data shows Variable Speed Limit (VSL) signage on Interstates 80 and 81 has reduced crashes and fatalities.

Snow squall driving simulation to help Pennsylvanians visualize driving in winter weather is now available for free.

Clearfield, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PA Turnpike), Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), Pennsylvania State Police (PSP), and the National Weather Service (NWS) today highlighted that Shapiro Administration’s investments in Variable Speed Limit (VSL) signage across the Commonwealth have saved lives - leading to an average of 7 percent fewer winter crashes and a 34 percent decrease in serious injuries and fatalities in these crashes - during a visit to PennDOT’s Clearfield-based District 2 Regional Traffic Management Center (RTMC). PennDOT also reminded Pennsylvanians of the resources - including a snow squall driving simulation - available to help them stay safe while driving in winter weather.

“Safe driving is important year-round, but it’s even more essential in the winter when weather conditions can change quickly,” said **PennDOT Secretary Mike Carroll**. “If you receive a snow squall warning while driving on an interstate, the best thing to do is take the next exit and find a safe place to park. If that’s not possible, stay in your lane and slow down gradually, increasing your following distance. Turn on your headlights and hazard lights so other vehicles can see you. And buckle up! Your seat belt could save your life if you are in a crash.”

According to the [NWS](#), a snow squall is a brief and intense period of heavy snow (up to 2 inches in 30 minutes), strong winds (30+ mph), and whiteout conditions (visibility less than ¼ mile). Due to their isolated and intense nature, snow squalls can catch drivers off guard and lead to major transportation impacts, including multi-vehicle crashes.

“Snow squalls can create dangerous driving conditions in just seconds, so the best defense is planning ahead to avoid them,” said **PEMA Director Randy Padfield**. “Check the forecast before traveling and consider delaying trips when snow squalls are expected. Plus, consider stocking your vehicle with basic emergency supplies like blankets, water, a flashlight, and a phone charger to be ready for emergencies that may occur any time you’re driving.”

“While the PA Turnpike has 24-hour roadway maintenance in the winter months, we still need people to slow down in these conditions and let our crews do their jobs,” said **PA Turnpike Chief Operating Officer Craig Shuey**. “Stay safely behind the plow trucks and do not pass them as they work. It will keep everyone safe.”

[Last January](#), Hofstra University announced that Professor Dr. Jase Bernhardt developed a virtual reality snow squall simulator in partnership with the NWS to help drivers visualize what it is like to drive into a snow squall. The snow squall driving simulation is now available to all drivers on both the [Meta Quest Store](#) (virtual reality headset) and [online](#) (for use with a desktop computer), free of charge.

“This immersive VR simulation places drivers in a realistic snow squall scenario complete with many of the visual and audible cues a Pennsylvania motorist would encounter,” said **NWS Warning Coordination Meteorologist Jonathan Guseman**. “By experiencing these conditions firsthand, drivers gain a deeper understanding of snow squall severity and the recommended life-saving actions to take when a Snow Squall Warning is issued.”

On days when snow squalls are possible, NWS will brief its partners, including the PA Turnpike, PennDOT, PEMA, and other public safety and emergency management officials. These agencies can then activate changeable message signs, variable speed limits, and wireless emergency alerts to convey the impending danger from snow squalls to drivers and the public.

[As part of these safety measures, variable speed limit \(VSL\) signs](#) quickly reduce speed limits when visibility or roadway conditions present the need for more cautious driving, such as during a snow squall. PennDOT has 83 VSL signs located along Interstate 80 and I-81 and the PA Turnpike has 13 VSL signs along I-70/76 in the Laurel Highlands, one of the snowiest regions in the state. Locations were chosen based on crash and weather data, such as frequency of wintry conditions that demand safer driving, and where crashes caused by whiteout conditions led to roadway closures of more than three hours.

- 36 locations along I-80 in Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, and Union counties, mile marker (MM) 97-210.
- Six locations on I-80 in Clarion and Jefferson counties on the approaches to Emlenton Bridge (MM 42-45), North Fork Bridge (MM 78-81), and Kyle Lake Bridge (MM 92-95).
- Five locations on I-80 in Mercer County (Ohio state line to MM 6 and MM 16-20).
- 36 locations along I-81 from I-78 to I-80 in Lebanon (five locations), Luzerne (seven locations), and Schuylkill (24 locations) counties.
- 13 locations along I-70/76 (PA Turnpike), between the New Stanton Interchange (Exit 75) and the Somerset Interchange (Exit 110), from MM 82 to MM 109.

Data shows VSL signs have decreased winter crashes by an average of 7 percent on I-80 when compared to the previous five-year average. Serious injuries and fatalities in crashes decreased by an average of 34 percent for the same locations. Data shows total injuries in crashes decreased by an average of 6 percent on I-81. Furthermore, variable speed limits are one of the Federal Highway Administration's proven safety countermeasures—a collection of infrastructure-oriented strategies proven through research to reduce roadway fatalities and serious injuries.

While the VSLs are in place, permanent speed limit signs are covered, and the normal posted speed limit is displayed on the VSL unless visibility or winter weather conditions call for slower speeds. When speed limits are reduced, a yellow light at the top and bottom of the VSL will be flashing to ensure drivers are aware of the change.

Additionally, PennDOT has an automated weather corridor on I-90 to alert drivers of potential whiteout conditions ahead. When weather stations in the area indicate low visibility and high levels of snow intensity, changeable message signs approaching the area are automatically updated with warning messages to inform drivers they are approaching dangerous driving conditions: "Whiteout conditions ahead, reduce speed."

"Drivers can be cited for driving too fast for conditions, even if they are below the posted speed limit, if weather or road conditions make their speed unsafe for the existing hazards," said **PSP Acting Commissioner Lieutenant Colonel George L. Bivens**. "If you are involved in a crash on a slippery road, do not stand outside your vehicle on or near the roadway. In most situations, you will be safer inside your vehicle with your seatbelt fastened and your hazard lights activated."

While avoiding or delaying unnecessary travel during winter storms is the safest choice, the next best choice is to exit the roadway and park in a safe location until the squall passes. If you do drive into a squall, the agencies offer this advice:

- Slow down gradually and drive at a speed that suits conditions.
- Turn on your headlights. If caught in a snow squall, turn on your hazard lights.
- Stay in your lane and increase your following distance.
- Stay alert, keep looking as far ahead as possible and be patient.
- Do not drive distracted; your full attention is required.

- Use your defroster and wipers.
- Keep windows and mirrors free of snow and ice.
- During whiteouts, come to a complete stop only when you can safely pull off the roadway.
- Do not stop in the flow of traffic since this could cause a chain-reaction collision.
- Do not pass a vehicle moving slowly or speed up to get away from a vehicle that is following too closely.
- Always buckle up and never drive impaired.
- Have an emergency kit handy. Visit [ReadyPA](#) for a list of emergency supplies to keep in your car.

Drivers can check conditions on more than 40,000 roadway miles, including color-coded winter conditions on 2,900 miles, by visiting [www.511PA.com](#). 511PA, which is free and available 24 hours a day, provides traffic delay warnings, weather forecasts, traffic speed information, and access to more than 1,200 traffic cameras.

511PA is also available through a free smartphone application for iPhone and Android devices, by calling 5-1-1, or by [following local alerts on X](#).

Subscribe to [statewide](#) PennDOT news and traffic alerts or subscribe to news in a [specific county or region](#). Find PennDOT news on [X](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).

Visit [www.weather.gov/ctp/snowsquall](#) for more information on snow squalls, or to access the snow squall simulation.

Editor's Note: Photos and video from the event will be available at [PACast.com](#).

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