

How Bad Weather Impacts Fault and Liability in Maine Car Accidents

Our trusted attorneys are here to help after a weather-related car accident

Driving in a Maine snowstorm can feel like walking on a frozen lake. You think you're on solid ground until one wrong step sends everything sliding. Snow, sleet, and freezing rain are part of life here, but even seasoned drivers know that one patch of ice or moment of poor visibility can change everything.

When a car accident happens in bad weather, many people assume it was unavoidable or that no one is to blame. The truth is more complicated. Maine's laws don't let drivers off the hook just because conditions were rough. Understanding how weather affects fault and liability can help you protect yourself if you're ever involved in a weather-related accident.

How does Maine's fault system apply to bad weather accidents?

Maine follows a fault-based insurance system, which means the driver responsible for causing a crash must pay for the resulting injuries and property damage. Even when the weather plays a role, the law still expects every driver to act with reasonable care based on the conditions. That means slowing down, increasing following distance, keeping headlights on, and making sure the vehicle is in safe condition to drive.

Bad weather doesn't automatically excuse negligence. If someone drives too fast for an icy road, follows another vehicle too closely, or fails to clear snow from their windshield, they can still be found at fault. The question isn't whether the weather was bad; it's whether the driver took the right precautions.

For example, if a car skids on black ice and rear-ends another vehicle, the insurance company and police will look at whether that driver was going too fast or braking too suddenly. Even though ice contributed to the crash, the driver may still be liable for not adjusting their speed. Maine law holds people accountable for how they respond to conditions, not just the conditions themselves.

What are the most common types of bad weather car accidents in Maine?

Maine's weather changes fast, and with each season comes its own driving challenges. Some of the most common bad-weather crashes include:

- **Snow and ice collisions:** These can happen when drivers lose traction and slide through intersections or into other vehicles.
- **Freezing rain and black ice:** These invisible hazards cause countless spinouts and rear-end crashes, especially on bridges and overpasses.
- **Heavy rain:** Water buildup can lead to hydroplaning and loss of control, particularly when tires are worn.

- **Fog:** Dense fog along coastal or rural roads can reduce visibility to just a few feet, which can lead to multi-vehicle chain reactions.
- **High winds:** Strong gusts can push vehicles out of their lanes or send debris onto the roadway.

While weather often gets the blame, most of these crashes happen because someone failed to adapt. The safest drivers are the ones who slow down, avoid tailgating, and keep their focus on the road instead of relying on luck.

How do police and insurance companies determine fault in weather-related crashes?

After a crash, both police and insurance companies investigate to figure out who caused it. They look at a wide range of factors, such as:

- How fast each driver was going compared to road conditions
- Whether headlights, taillights, and windshield wipers were being used
- Skid marks, vehicle positions, and impact points
- The condition of each car's tires and brakes
- Statements from witnesses or footage from dashcams

Even if the roads were slick, investigators still want to know whether someone was driving carelessly. For example, if a driver slides into another car because they were following too closely, they're likely at fault for not maintaining a safe distance.

Police officers may note "weather conditions" on the crash report, but that doesn't mean no one was negligent. Insurance companies rarely assign fault to "the weather." Instead, they decide whether each driver acted reasonably for the situation. If both drivers made mistakes, fault can be shared.

Can bad weather reduce or eliminate driver liability?

In rare cases, bad weather can reduce a driver's responsibility, but those situations are few and far between. Legally, this kind of event is sometimes called an "Act of God" or an "unavoidable accident." It applies only when the weather made the crash truly impossible to prevent.

For example, imagine a driver traveling well below the speed limit during a sudden flash freeze. If the road instantly turns to ice and their car slides off the highway despite every reasonable effort to maintain control, they might not be held liable.

But most of the time, weather is only part of the story. Even during blizzards, drivers are expected to take proper precautions or stay off the road altogether. When a crash happens, investigators ask one question: could this have been avoided if the driver had been more careful? If the answer is yes, the driver can still be found at fault.

What is comparative negligence and how does it affect weather-related claims?

Maine follows a modified comparative negligence rule under state law ([14 M.R.S. §156](#)). This rule allows you to recover damages as long as you're less than 50% at fault for the crash. However, your compensation is reduced by your percentage of responsibility.

Let's say you were driving cautiously but still slid into another car on an icy road. The investigation finds that you were 20% responsible because your tires were worn, and the other driver was 80% responsible for speeding. You can still recover 80% of your total damages from that driver's insurance company.

Comparative negligence often comes into play in bad weather crashes where both drivers make mistakes. One driver might have been driving too fast, while the other didn't leave enough distance or failed to clear snow from their windows. Understanding this rule is important because insurance companies often try to increase your share of fault to reduce what they have to pay.

How can drivers prove fault in a bad weather accident?

When the weather changes quickly, so does the evidence. Snow melts, ice refreezes, and fog clears. So, documenting the scene right away can make or break a case. Here's what to do if you're involved in a bad weather crash:

- Take photos and videos of the scene, road surface, and visibility at the time of the car accident.
- Record weather details, including temperature and precipitation, or take screenshots from a weather app.
- Exchange contact information with witnesses who can confirm conditions or what they saw.
- Request a police report and review it for accuracy.
- Keep all repair and medical records related to the crash.

Photos and weather data can help prove that the other driver didn't take proper precautions. If you can show they were speeding, tailgating, or driving recklessly, it's easier to demonstrate that their actions caused the crash.

How can poor vehicle maintenance impact liability during bad weather?

Vehicle maintenance matters just as much as driving behavior. Maine drivers are expected to keep their cars in safe working order, especially during the winter. When a crash happens in bad weather, investigators often look at the condition of the vehicles involved.

If a driver loses control because of bald tires, worn brakes, or broken wipers, that can be considered negligence. These issues increase stopping distance, reduce traction, and make it harder to see in rain or snow. Even if the road was slippery, the driver might still be held liable for not keeping their car safe to drive.

Something as simple as forgetting to replace windshield wipers or neglecting to install snow tires can make the difference between a near miss and a collision. In Maine's harsh climate, proper maintenance is part of being a responsible driver.

How can a Maine car accident lawyer help with weather-related crashes?

Weather-related crashes can get complicated fast. When several cars are involved or the conditions were especially severe, figuring out who's to blame isn't always straightforward. Insurance companies may try to argue that the crash was unavoidable or that you share more responsibility than you actually do.

A Maine car accident lawyer can help by:

- Investigating the crash scene and preserving evidence before it's lost
- Gathering weather reports and road condition data from the day of the crash
- Working with car accident reconstruction experts to show how negligence caused the collision
- Handling all communication with insurance companies so you don't feel pressured into accepting a low settlement
- Identifying every possible source of compensation, especially when multiple policies are involved

The legal team at [Romanow Law Group](#) understands how weather impacts fault and liability and knows how to build strong cases for injured drivers and passengers. We'll investigate what happened, gather the evidence you need, and fight to hold negligent drivers accountable.

[Contact us](#) today for a free consultation and find out how we can help you get the compensation you deserve. We work on a contingency fee basis, so you can get a dedicated lawyer without any upfront or hidden costs.