

Safe Travel on Logging Roads



information guide



OFSWA

Ontario Forestry Safe Workplace Association

Partners on the Road to Zero

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A different kind of road

If you have a chance to fly over a bush area that has been logged, you will see a complex network of roads constructed to move people, machinery and logs. These roads are not meant to be permanent and are not built or maintained to the same standards as roads designed primarily for passenger vehicles.

Numerous aspects of travel on logging roads require special vehicle and driver preparation. The roads are seldom mapped and there isn't the usual pattern of signs and cautions you would find on a public highway. Fuel and mechanical assistance, as well as police and emergency medical services, may be many kilometres away. Road surfaces are either dirt or gravel, creating dust, large stones and mud hazards in summer and snow and ice hazards in winter. Washouts are frequent, and major washouts can occur as a result of broken dams as long as two to five days after the last rain.



Logging roads are generally narrow with soft shoulders and may not allow for two vehicles to meet and pass each other safely. Grades may be much steeper than those found on provincial roads. Visibility is often severely limited because of sharp corners and high growth in ditches. Hunters, anglers and campers may be driving in the middle or on the wrong side of the road, thinking they are the only ones using the road. The danger of colliding with a large wild animal such as a moose, bear or deer is constant. Other obstacles such as deep water, large rocks or logs may be encountered without warning.

Using company vehicles

Most employers have strict policies about who may drive company vehicles on logging roads, particularly special-purpose machines such as multi-passenger vans, buses, tanker trucks and personnel carriers. Special training may be required to operate company vehicles as specified by law and insurance companies. Do not operate any vehicle unless you are trained, qualified and competent to do so.

Before using the vehicle, the operator may be required to fill out and sign a technical safety checklist based on a walk-around inspection or circle check of the vehicle. Company vehicle policies may also cover such details as the designated operator's qualifications, required communications procedures (usually two-way radio) and rules for passengers such as mandatory seat belt use and a limit on the number of passengers in a vehicle.

Other important considerations in the use of company vehicles on logging roads are the safe storage of spare fuel, regular checks of the condition of the tires and spare tire, and the provision and storage of on-board tools, first aid supplies, fire fighting equipment and other emergency gear. These emergency supplies should be in your own private vehicle as well.

Operators and passengers must be aware of safe procedures for loading trucks and trailers. They also need to know the designated speed limit and other special rules of the road, safety procedures during encounters with log trucks and other working vehicles, as well as the penalties for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Whether you're operating your own vehicle or driving a company vehicle, here's some important advice.

Adapting to conditions

Although logging roads don't have nearly as many signs as standard provincial roads, the Occupational Health and Safety Act's Regulation for Industrial Establishments, Section 117(c), requires signs warning of bridges, crossroads, blind curves, steep grades and railway crossings. Drivers must heed these warnings, as well as speed limit policies and signs, and should be aware of mileage markers along the road for orientation purposes.

Traction, especially for steering and braking, is considerably reduced on dirt or gravel surfaces compared to pavement. A slower driving speed is required in order to give the operator sufficient time to react to any sudden hazard, especially when the road surface is wet. Drivers must have a heightened attention to potential obstacles such as washouts, logs and rocks that were not on the road on the way out but may suddenly appear on the way back.



Because rough roads damage vehicles every minute of operation, a circle check should be performed daily to ensure the vehicle is safe. Check the ground under the vehicle before driving it. Loss of engine oil or brake fluid could have serious consequences on the road. After driving through water, be sure to check your brakes. Apply light pressure to dry them if necessary. Report any road surface damage, such as an old or unrepaired washout, for the safety of other drivers.

Heavy trucks can create deep ruts in the road surface. Wheels on lighter vehicles such as pickup trucks may not fit in these ruts, resulting in loss of control. Washboard road conditions can make a vehicle unstable and cause loss of control. Drive slowly and grip the steering wheel firmly. To avoid excessive brake wear and tire failure, select a lower gear to control the vehicle instead of riding the brakes.

Encountering traffic

Pickup trucks and other passenger vehicles should yield the right of way to log trucks, loaded or unloaded. Always slow down when encountering other vehicles, people or wildlife. Do not pass another vehicle unless it's absolutely necessary. Road conditions, particularly shoulders, may be unsafe for passing and the dust and stones your vehicle kicks up could endanger the other driver.

When following another vehicle, stay well behind it to avoid dust and flying stones. Heavy dust may reduce visibility, especially during sunrise and sunset. Slow down, pull safely off the road and wait for the dust to settle before proceeding, as another vehicle may be approaching and hidden in the dust. Your headlights should be on at all times and you should use additional warning lights if necessary. In some conditions, such as cresting a steep hill or driving around a sharp bend, sound your horn before proceeding to warn others of your approach. If another vehicle is gaining on you from behind, find a safe place to pull over to be passed and signal your intention to do so.

If you become lost or your vehicle is disabled, park safely and stay with your vehicle. Use the radio or flag down another passing vehicle to ask for directions or assistance.

Winter conditions

Winter driving conditions aren't confined to that season on northern Ontario logging roads. In heavy snowfall years, roads may be snow and ice-packed with large snowbanks well into April. The spring break-up can worsen road conditions, and some areas experience major snowstorms in April and September or October.

In winter conditions, be sure to warm the vehicle and clear all windows of snow, ice or frost before driving it. Test radio equipment before starting a trip and check in often along the route. Carry emergency equipment such as shovels, tow straps and jumper cables. Also carry extra clothing, food and water in case you become lost or stranded.

Reduce your speed and leave more space between vehicles. Avoid shoulders, as deep snow can easily pull you into the ditch. Also avoid driving through puddles in freezing conditions to keep your brakes from freezing. Know how to shift a four-wheel-drive system if the vehicle is so equipped. Keep lights, especially warning and emergency lights, clean at all times.

Freezing rain is an extremely dangerous condition. Don't drive unless it's absolutely necessary and make sure the heater/defroster is working at peak efficiency. An unloaded or lightly-loaded truck may not have as much traction at the rear wheels. Practise braking and skid-control maneuvers in a safe location.

Other means of travel

Driving heavy trucks, tracked vehicles and ATVs requires specialized training, licensing and personal protective equipment. Do not operate such equipment unless you have received training that's specific to them and you possess the required safety gear.

GENERAL TIPS FOR SAFE TRAVEL ON LOGGING ROADS

- Be prepared for sudden encounters with obstacles such as spilled logs and large rocks.
- Windshields will soon become dirty or mud-covered. Stop safely and clean windows as often as necessary.
- Wear sunglasses, especially when driving into early morning or late afternoon sun.
- Use a seat belt at all times and make sure all passengers are securely seated.
- The vehicle should be turned around at the beginning of the day so that a safe and speedy exit can be made in an emergency. (Turn the vehicle around in a safe place away from blind corners and hills.)
- If you have to jack up a vehicle, make sure it's on solid, level ground with the wheels chocked with stones or other obstacles.
- Be particularly cautious driving in the bush when conditions increase the probability for forest fire.
- In lightning storms, stay inside your vehicle with all doors and windows closed.