

Safety Note # 195

## OFF-ROAD DRIVING SAFETY



According to the Federal Highway Administration, almost 35 percent of the roadways in the US are unpaved roads. Many drivers have never driven on unpaved roads, or are inexperienced and lack the skills and knowledge to drive on them safely. Most non-paved roads are narrow, and may not accommodate two-way traffic. Some roads have a soft, sloping shoulder or none at all. Most unpaved roads are in farm country, rural areas, and forest locations as logging and forest service roads. While on unpaved roads, you are likely to encounter wildlife, livestock, and a variety of other vehicle users including tractors, ATV's, motocross bikes, cyclist, horseback riders, and hikers. Unpaved roads can be very unpredictable and caution must always be practiced.

### Unpaved Roads –

Are generally gravel or dirt roads or a combination of both. They usually lack safety/warning signs, speed signs, and guard rails. Off roads can have soft surfaces (uncompact gravel or dirt), ruts, rough or damaged road surfaces (washboard effect), sharp and blind curves, and steep grades. The following tips should be used while driving on unpaved roads.

- Tire traction on loose gravel or dirt roads is compromised greatly. The tires and suspension on your vehicle might not be designed for off road driving. Even the most technologically advanced four-wheel drive vehicle can't make up for tires not meant for the unpaved road.
- Reduced speed is required to prevent sliding out and losing control of your vehicle. Take corners and steep grades slowly. Brake and accelerate slowly. Leave a good distance between you and the vehicle ahead of you.
- Weather conditions can cause unpaved roads to be impassable or difficult to manage. Unpaved roads may not drain well and rain can cause the road to be muddy or washed out, resulting in a stuck vehicle. Watch for deep water in rainy weather or post-rain conditions. Wind can cause dusty conditions impeding your visibility.
- Try to drive on previously driven roads and not make your own road. Making your own road can get you stuck, cause environmental damage, and may be illegal in some areas.
- Tell somebody where you're going and when you expect to get back. Your cell phone might not work where you are going. Bring food, water, and a tow strap or come-along with you in case you get stuck.
- Fill your fuel tank and check tire pressure before getting on unpaved roads.
- Practice caution when passing oncoming vehicles so as not to be driven off the road or the other vehicle off the road. On a narrow, steep grade road, the vehicle traveling uphill should yield to the vehicle traveling downhill.
- If towing, maintain a lower speed than normal to allow stopping without skidding.
- Road signs for speed limits or hazards may be infrequent or non-existent in off-road areas, but be sure to follow any posted limits or warnings.
- Honor any restricted areas or gates, unless you have permission to pass through. Return the gate in the position you found it (open or closed).
- When driving off-road at UC ANR facilities, check in at the main office for any specific instructions or restrictions. Some locations may provide you with a radio to maintain contact with the main office.

For more driver safety information, see: the following Safety Notes:

[075 Safe Driving Practices](#)

[132 Driving and Cell Phone Use](#)

[175 Safe Driving in Large Vehicles](#)

[090 Driving Safely While Towing a Trailer,](#)

[174 Safe Driving on Country Roads,](#)