

FREE PRINTABLE RESOURCE

COLD-WEATHER VEHICLE RECOVERY FIELD CARD

For the mornings nobody else is around to push. Keep this sheet in the glovebox, not in a drawer at home.

1. BEFORE YOU TOUCH THE GAS

☐ Don't floor it

AAA: flooring the gas digs drive tires deeper and can burn tires or strain CV joints, U-joints, or the transmission

☐ Clear the tailpipe before starting the engine

AAA and NHTSA both name this: a blocked exhaust pipe lets carbon monoxide build up inside the car once it's running

☐ Keep the path back clear

AAA: matters most on a hill, where losing the path out means sliding toward a tree, ditch, or another car

☐ Recruit help if any is around

AAA is direct: extra hands save more time than working it alone. This card is for when nobody is

2. CLEAR IT

☐ Dig out front, under, and behind each drive tire

AAA: not just what's visible on the surface. Clear enough for the tire to roll a few feet forward and back

☐ Check the undercarriage too

AAA: snow or ice packed underneath can block movement even after the tires are clear

☐ No shovel: use a scraper or a flat board

Anything that breaks up packed snow under the tire works if a shovel isn't in the car (our own note)

3. KILL TRACTION CONTROL, THEN ROCK IT

☐ Turn off traction control

AAA: letting the wheels spin a little more than the system allows can help them dig to real grip

☐ Window down, wheels straight

AAA: hear and watch the tires; straight wheels reduce drag, especially in an existing track

☐ Lowest gear, light throttle, full stop before switching gears

AAA: forward until the car rises on the rut and the pedal pulses (that's ABS, normal), stop fully, then reverse the same way

☐ Ease off if it's just spinning

AAA: too much spin melts snow into ice, which is harder to escape than what was there first

4. ADD TRACTION UNDER THE DRIVE TIRES

☐ Chains, wood, a floor mat, cardboard, sand, gravel, or non-clumping cat litter

AAA's own list. Chains work best but aren't always on hand or legal everywhere

☐ Object about 2 feet long, wedged at the drive tire

AAA: front for forward, behind for reverse. Apply throttle carefully, it can shoot out

☐ Traction on both sides of the tire

AAA: if forward doesn't work, reverse still might

Drive tires

FWD: front • RWD: rear • AWD/4WD: all four (AAA)

Effort limit

A couple honest rounds. More just packs ice and drains the battery (our own rule)

5. IF YOU'RE STILL STUCK

☐ Stay with the car, don't overexert

NHTSA's direct instruction once digging stops helping

☐ Be seen: bright markers + dome light on

NHTSA: antenna or window markers, interior dome light

☐ Exhaust clear, engine sporadic only

NHTSA: just long enough to stay warm, never long with windows up or in an enclosed space

☐ Hard to control? Pull over, stop, set the parking brake

Ready.gov's instruction if the car becomes unmanageable at any point

Watch your hands: shoveling and rocking a car out with wet gloves in freezing air is exactly how frostbite starts before it's noticed. Warm and dry them the moment you're back inside, and know the early signs before you're out here again.

6. WHAT LIVES IN THE CAR

☐ NHTSA's winter list

Shovel, broom, ice scraper • sand or cat litter • jumper cables, flashlight, flares • first aid kit • blankets • phone, charger, water, food, medicine

☐ Ready.gov's list

Jumper cables • flares or reflective triangle • ice scraper • phone charger • blanket • map • cat litter or sand

Route told

Who knows my route + ETA _____

Sources

AAA 7 Tips to Get Unstuck from Snow • NHTSA Winter Weather Driving Tips • Ready.gov Car Safety

Full guide: tacticalbox.com/blogs/tacticalbox-blog/cold-weather-vehicle-recovery-getting-unstuck-alone

Educational use only, not a substitute for professional roadside assistance or your vehicle's owner's manual. Conditions vary. Always follow instructions from local emergency management.

GET UNSTUCK. GET HOME.

TACTICALBOX