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Thanksgiving travel: recipes for disaster

MEDFORD — Oh, by now you've heard the cautions from law enforcement and emergency service agencies, from auto clubs and the Oregon Department of Transportation.

They implore you to "celebrate safely" during the holiday season and provide you a long list of finger-wagging, safety advice: "Buckle up," "Drive safely" "Pack wisely" and...blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

So, let's get serious. You're just not that kind of driver. You're not the safety-first, plan-ahead, cautious type. Nope. You're a hot mess. You're trouble on wheels, assuredly approaching another fly-by-the-seat of your pants trip to grandma's house for a Thanksgiving marked by giblet gravy, dry breast meat and family tensions.

This year we're offering you recipes for disaster, a culmination of common mistakes and boneheaded behaviors seen on state highways during the holiday season.

So, without further ado, let's get cooking.

No-prep relish tray

Don't bother checking the weather report. Or the highway report. And don't get your vehicle professionally-checked bumper to bumper before your extra-long trip. Let the surprises come, surprises like a poorly-working heater or a flat tire. You're well on your way to a roadside tow...and a late dinner.

Fast-foot turkey

In culinary speech, you're replacing an oven's slow roast for microwave cooking. Dashing out of the house, hours later than you planned to leave, you plan to 'make up time' on the road.

Under the best driving conditions, running 75 mph on Interstate 5 saves you roughly ten minutes for every hour you drive. Over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, here's what is working against that strategy: heavy traffic, winter weather and a cadre of law enforcement officers on

the lookout for dirty birds just like you. A hot foot not only is a major factor of crashes but also potentially drains your holiday budget on speeding tickets.

“Leave home an hour earlier and you can reach any destination in the state of Oregon on time and at the posted speed,” said ODOT Spokesman Gary Leaming. “It’s just that simple.”

Strained attention

Increased traffic, winter weather and reduced visibility not enough to demand your full attention while you drive? Add electronic devices to the mix — use your smart phone or your tablet to text friends and watch viral cat videos. Don’t forget the maximum fine for using a mobile communication device while you drive is \$500. Of course, the maximum risk is death. Distracted driving is now nationally recognized as one of the major causes of highway crashes, right up there with drunk driving and speeding.

Rural road turnovers

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (yep, another finger-wagging safety organization) reported the “most frequently identified contributing factor among run-off-road crashes was distraction.” ROR crashes are associated with low-visibility and low-friction.

“NHTSA is talking about nighttime driving in the rain,” said Leaming.

Under those conditions, ROR crashes can lead to a rollover where the vehicle flips.

“Rollovers are relatively rare but are much more likely to result in serious injury or death,” said Leaming. “Nearly 75 percent of all rollover crashes occur in rural areas, so be extra careful when driving on rural roads.”

Another way to go

So, now you’re curious about those handy winter driving safety tips. Before you leave, check out these free travel information resources available to help Oregonians arrive at their holiday destination safely.

Road conditions and cameras: www.tripcheck.com; 5-1-1

Winter tips: www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/winterdriving.shtml

