

## Editorial ? Studded tires: worth any damage caused?

We wonder how many of the cars that were caught last week in multi-vehicle pileups on Ontario's freeways or wound up in ditches after skidding off other roads had studded tires.

For those who doubt any were, because they are prohibited, the fact is that anyone living in Parry Sound or farther north can have studded snow tires and drive with them anywhere in Ontario and all the continental U.S. states except Florida.

And the studs, which add about \$100 to the cost of four new snow tires, are legal in all the other provinces and most of the U.S. states, where they are seen as an important additional safety measure in coping with winter conditions, particularly in dealing with the 'black ice' deemed responsible for most of last week's crashes and ditchings.

Interestingly, a news release from Ontario's Ministry of Transportation (MTO) in late August advised that drivers who live in northern Ontario (that is, in Parry Sound and north) can now put on studded tires earlier and keep them on longer, providing motorists with more options to stay safe during severe or extended winter weather.

The release said the Northern residents can now use studded tires from Sept. 1 to May 31 instead of Oct. 1 to April 1. The change is based on advice and recommendations from the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP).

Under the current regulations, studded tires can be used on vehicles that have an ownership address in the districts of Algoma, Cochrane, Kenora, Manitoulin, Nipissing, Parry Sound, Rainy River, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, and Temiskaming, as well as by out-of-province vehicles travelling in Ontario for less than a month.

The revised rules were trumpeted as part of the government's plan to invest in people, build modern infrastructure and support a dynamic and innovative business climate.

The release said studded tires are proven to be more effective than other tires on wet, icy road conditions, and that only lightweight, Scandinavian studs can be used in Ontario.

Studded tires were originally banned in Ontario in 1972 after a technical review established that the studs then in use were causing extensive damage to roads. Several other North American jurisdictions also banned them at that time. However, in 2005, Ontario introduced legislation permitting them in the north and synchronizing with Manitoba and Quebec the period (Oct. 1 to April 30) when studs were permitted. MTO also prescribed the use of Scandinavian standard lightweight studs, which are lighter than those used in the tires banned in the 1970s, resulting in only one-third as much damage to the pavement. The legislation also limited the use of studded tires on vehicles in excess of 3.5 tonnes to municipal emergency and winter maintenance vehicles.

Residents of Southern Ontario are not permitted to use studded tires because most roads are well-maintained with fewer extreme hills and turns, the release said. Also, the traffic volumes are higher and many pavements are made with local limestone that is softer than the Canadian Shield rock in the north. While there have been improvements to studded tires, allowing them in these conditions is expected to result in pavement damage, dust and reduced air quality. Therefore, the scope of this proposal remains specific to Northern Ontario residents only.

That, to us, is an argument that doesn't stand up against real-world experience. Yes, traffic volumes are much higher in the south, but so are the crash rates. And as for the potential damage to roads, how is that any different from what you would expect in New York State and Michigan, where studs are permitted?

Our submission is that at a time when the government is trying to find ways to cut the cost of insurance, studs should be seen as one means of substantially reducing the number and costliness of winter collisions.