

# Winter tires within Europe, in Iceland and Norway



November 11th

**2013**

In most of the EU countries winter tires for cars are not mandatory, but there are exceptions... Before going on holidays, it could be useful to get an overview of the situation in each European country, in Iceland and Norway. 28 ECCs answered the following questions:

- are winter tires mandatory or not?
- if not are there special areas (or caution signs on the road) where you need winter tires?
- are studded tires allowed?

## ➤ Countries where the winter tires are legally mandatory

### Estonia

Winter tires are mandatory in Estonia from December 1st to March 1st. Winter tires are allowed from 15<sup>th</sup> of October to 31<sup>st</sup> of March. With exceptional road- and weather conditions it's allowed to use studded tires from 1<sup>th</sup> of October to 30<sup>th</sup> of April.

Within the period from 1<sup>st</sup> May to 1<sup>st</sup> October it is forbidden to use vehicles with studded tires.

Winter tires without studs (all-season tires) are allowed to use all year around.

### Finland

In Finland winter tires are compulsory from 1<sup>st</sup> December to the end of February. Spiked tires may be used from 1<sup>st</sup> November until the first Monday after Easter. The tread depth has to be at least 3 mm. These regulations also apply to cars which have been registered abroad.

### Slovenia

From 15<sup>th</sup> November to 15<sup>th</sup> March and beyond these dates, during winter weather conditions (e.g. during snowfalls, black ice, etc.) private cars and vehicles up to 3.5 t must have winter equipment as follows:

- winter tires on all four wheels or
- summer tires on all four wheels + snow chains in car boot

In both cases, the minimum tire tread depth must be 3 mm.

Vehicles over 3.5 t must have winter tires at least on the driving wheels or summer tires on all four wheels + snow chains in car boot.

Exception: at the seaside region sufficient winter equipment are summer tires with the minimum tire tread depth 3 mm (no need to have chains in car boot). But during winter weather conditions (e.g. during snowfalls, black ice, etc.) snow chains have to be mounted on drive wheels.

This regulation applies also to vehicles with foreign registration plates but only during winter weather conditions.

## Latvia

In Latvia within the period from 1<sup>st</sup> December to 1<sup>st</sup> March all vehicles shall be fitted with tires, which are suitable for driving in winter conditions. Within the period from 1<sup>st</sup> May to 1<sup>st</sup> October it is forbidden to use vehicles with studded tires. In addition winter tires should have at least 4 mm tread depth.

## Sweden

Between December 1<sup>st</sup> and March 31<sup>st</sup> it is mandatory to have winter tires or equal equipment. During the mandatory period the tread depth must be at least 3mm. These rules also apply to foreign cars traveling through Sweden.

Any trailer attached to a vehicle needs to follow the rules regarding winter tires.

If the vehicle has studded tires then so must the trailer. If the vehicle uses friction tires it's ok to use friction tires or studded tires.

In Sweden studded tires is allowed between October 1<sup>st</sup> and April 15<sup>th</sup> or if winter road conditions apply or is expected.

As from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013, heavy trucks, heavy buses and private cars class II (campers) with a total weight of more than 3.5 metric tons, are to have winter tires or equivalent equipment on the vehicle's driven wheels when there are wintry conditions on the roads during the period from 1<sup>st</sup> December to 31<sup>st</sup> March. The depth of the tire tread of all tires on heavy vehicles is to be at least 5 millimeters during wintry road conditions. This requirement does not apply to attached trailers.

For more information (in English) check out the Swedish Transport Agency website where you can find e.g. the definition of winter road, the definition of winter tires, rules regarding lorries and trucks etc. <http://www.transportstyrelsen.se/en/road/Vehicles/winter-tyres/>

## ➤ Countries where the winter tires are mandatory if weather conditions so require

### Austria

#### Winter tires

In Austria from 1<sup>st</sup> November to 15<sup>th</sup> April, vehicles must be fitted with winter tires if weather conditions so require. These tires must be fitted on all wheels when roads are covered in snow or ice. The tires must bear one of the usual marks as M+S, M.S. or M&S and have a minimum tread of 4 mm for radial tires (most common tires) and a minimum tread of 5 mm for cross-ply tires. Alternately, vehicles with summer tires must have chains, see below.

The tire's steel pins must not stick out more than 2 mm beyond the tire's tread and must settle tightly in the tire in order to avoid damage of the road surface and of other vehicles.

It is the driver's legal responsibility to carry the required winter equipment; therefore, it is essential to check that it is included in any hire car. This regulation applies to vehicles registered in Austria as well as those registered abroad.

### **Spiked tires**

Spiked tires may be used only from 1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>th</sup> May, though special local regulations may extend this period. These regulations also apply to temporarily imported vehicles.

Spiked tires may be used only on vehicles with steel radial tires, of a maximum total authorized weight not exceeding 3,500 kg and a maximum axle weight not exceeding 1,800 kg. They must be fitted on all wheels. If the towing vehicle has spiked tires, the trailer must be fitted with spiked tires on all wheels.

Vehicles fitted with spiked tires are subject to special speed limits (80 km/h outside built-up areas, 100 km/h on motorways), and must display at the rear the approved "spiked tires" sign. This sign is available from the automobile clubs, petrol stations, etc.

### **Snow chains**

The use of snow chains instead of winter tires is permitted if the road is continually or almost always under snow or ice. In extreme conditions the authorities can require cars to be fitted with snow chains on the driving wheels. All-wheel drive vehicles must be fitted with snow chains on at least two driving wheels of the same axle. The international road sign is used. The maximum speed recommended is 40 km/h.

You can find more information on <http://www.bmvit.gv.at/en/verkehr/roads/safety/tyres.html>

And for spikes on: <https://www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/content/6/Seite.0602201.html>

## **Germany**

Drivers must adapt the type of tires to the weather conditions. The German regulation has been precised in November 2010. In case of snow, black ice or hoarfrost, winter tires (or all-year-round tires with the mark M+S) are now mandatory.

Winter tires or all-year-round tires are required on all four wheels. For the 2 tires-vehicle (trailers and motorbikes for example), winter tires (or all-year-round tires with the mark M+S) are also mandatory. Winter tires must have at least 1,6 mm tread depth.

On the contrary, summer tires are allowed if weather conditions are milder than normally and shall stay like this during the day.

In opposition to rumors which are spread – especially on the web – this regulation doesn't state neither a minimal temperature, nor a determined period to indicate when the vehicles shall be fitted with winter tires.

The German authorities want to avoid risks due to an equipment of vehicles inappropriate to winter weather conditions, which hinder/impede the road traffic and can cause accidents. If you are in breach of the law, drivers can be fined (from 40 up to 120 €: it depends on the type of the offence. For instance: 120€ if causing an accident) and/or the vehicle immobilized. In case of an accident (caused by a third person or by your fault) during winter time, the consumer might encounter problems with his insurance in case he did not use appropriate tires.

Studded tires that could cause damage to the pavement are not allowed.

## **Romania**

In Romania winter tires are mandatory on roads covered with snow, ice or black ice, from 01<sup>st</sup> November to 31<sup>st</sup> March. These tires must be fitted on all wheels. The tires must bear the mark M+S or M&S. Winter tires must have at least 1,6 mm tread depth on minimum two thirds of the tread width.

Studded tires are allowed, but they must be approved (homologated), on public roads covered with snow, ice or black ice.

## **Czech Republic**

From 1<sup>st</sup> November to 31<sup>st</sup> March, vehicles must be fitted with winter tires if there is a consistent layer of snow, ice or icing on the road or if with regard to weather conditions it can be assumed that such layer can occur on the road during drive. Studded tires are not allowed. The tread depth to be considered a winter tire is min. 4 mm; at vehicles weighing more than 3,500 kg tread depth is 6 mm.

## **Croatia**

In Croatia, winter tires and additional winter equipment are mandatory during winter conditions (winter conditions are defined as such conditions when the road is covered with snow and/or ice). As to obligatory winter equipment during winter period, vehicles with a maximum mass up to 3.5 t must contain as follows:

- 4 winter tires (or M + S) or 4 summer tires with a minimum tread depth of 4 mm
- snow chains in car trunk.

During winter conditions, all vehicles in traffic must have the above mentioned equipment. Also, traffic is strictly forbidden to freight cars with trailers during such conditions.

Exceptionally, the Minister in charge of the traffic may prescribe that, on some parts of the particular road in a particular time, winter equipment is to be obligatory for a specific categories or types of vehicle, regardless of the existence of winter conditions.

In the case of non-compliance with the mandatory rules during the winter conditions, drivers will be fined in the amount of approx. 95 €.

## **Luxembourg**

As of October 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 winter tires for cars are obligatory in Luxembourg in the case of snow and ice on the road.

## **Norway**

It is not as such obligatory to drive with winter tires in Norway, but you must always adapt the type of tires to the weather conditions. One can therefore consider that it is in fact (more or less) mandatory to drive with winter tires during the winter in Norway.

From November 1<sup>st</sup> (or October 15<sup>th</sup> in the north of Norway), drivers are allowed to drive with studded tires without being fined. On the contrary drivers have the duty to remove studded tires from the first Monday after the second Easter day. From 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013 it is mandatory to have winter tires on heavy vehicles (over 3500 kg) until second easter day.

## Slovakia

If weather conditions so require, winter tires are mandatory for vehicles ( $m < 3.5$  tons). Weather conditions so require when roads are covered with **coherent layer** of snow, ice or frost.

Winter tires are **legally mandatory** for trucks ( $m \geq 3.5$  tons) and buses (at least one of the driving axle has to be fitted with winter tires) from 15 November to 31 March.

## ➤ Countries where the winter tires are mandatory only if there is a specific road sign

### France

Winter tires are generally not mandatory **but if** there is a specific road sign (decided by a special decree), they are mandatory.

### Spain

Generally, winter tires are not mandatory in Spain.

It is mandatory only when there is a specific public authority order or a specific road sign (in the mountains areas).

Studded tires are allowed. This kind of tires is considered as winter tires.

### Italy

Winter tires are generally not mandatory in Italy, but if there is a specific road sign (decided by a special decree), the vehicle has to be equipped with snow chains or winter tires during the period shown on the road sign.

## ➤ Countries where the winter tires are not mandatory

### Belgium, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Greece

Winter tires are not mandatory.

### Bulgaria

Winter tires are not mandatory. It is forbidden to use studded tires. Both summer and winter tires should have a tread depth of 1.6 mm.

## **Hungary**

In Hungary it is not mandatory to equip winter tires on cars, it is only recommended.

## **Denmark**

Winter tires are not mandatory. Studded tires are allowed from 1<sup>st</sup> November to 15<sup>th</sup> April.

## **Ireland**

Winter tires are not mandatory in Ireland. Studded tires are not illegal. However, studded tires should only be used in Ireland on compacted snow or ice. If a person is found using the tires on asphalt they can be prosecuted for causing damage to the road surface, which is prohibited under the Irish Road Traffic Regulations.

## **Iceland**

Winter tires are not strictly mandatory in Iceland for any period. The regulation states that you should have snow chains or other winter equipment like deep tread tires with or without studs when there is ice or snow on the road. If the winter is mild, some in the Southwest area could get away with using summer tires all year but deep tread all-year-round tires are most popular in Iceland.

Studs are allowed part of the year but there has been some discussion in the last few years about forbidding or limiting their use in the city/the Southwest area, both to limit damage to roads and therefore costs, and the environmental and health impact of the airborne particles.

Various regulations on size, shape, weight, distribution and applied force of studs on vehicles under and over 3500 kg. Snow chains are forbidden in conditions where they can cause damage to roads.

## **Lithuania**

Winter tires are not mandatory, but between 10th November - 1st April summer tires cannot be used. Consumers can use universal tires. Studded tires are not allowed between 10<sup>th</sup> April until 1<sup>st</sup> November. According to Lithuanian rules tire's tread depth should be not less than 3 mm to be considered a suitable tire for winter season.

## **Netherlands**

In the Netherlands winter tires for cars are not mandatory. Dutch consumers do purchase the winter tires because many Dutch people will go on winter holiday to France, Germany and Austria. Therefore they have to apply the rules of those countries and buy winter tires. The ANWB Royal Dutch Touring Club (branch organization) informs the consumer on their website which rules apply for what country concerning the winter tires.

The use of studded tires is not allowed in the Netherlands, because it damages the pavement.

## Poland

Winter tires **are not required** by law but it is highly recommended to use winter tires or universal tires during winter period due to the severe winters.

Generally chains are permitted, in certain designated places chain are mandatory. Places where chains are mandatory, precede signs which warn drivers that **snow chains** are necessary. These may only be used in case there is ice or snow covering the roads.

The use of snow chains requires sign C-18 (circular blue background with the wheel, "dressed" in the chain). This order is dismissed with the sign C-19 (similar to the sign C-18 with a warrant, except that it is crossed with the red line). It is required to use snow chains on at least two wheels of motor vehicles.

The **studded tires** are **strictly forbidden** in Poland. They may be used only during the winter sports events like rallies and races.

## United Kingdom

Winter tires are not mandatory, but are permitted. Snow chains are allowed, as are studded tires. Snow socks are also permitted. Further guidelines are below, as outlined in a recent independent audit commissioned by the UK government.

The subject of suitable tyres for vehicles in severe winter weather has been raised by the UK media and the public in response to problems experienced on the roads. The audit, in December 2010, called **The Resilience of England's Transport Systems** said that tyres should not be used if they could in any way damage the surface of the road. The audit gave four options for vehicles to change their tyres in winter conditions:

- Winter tires. These operate best at temperatures below 7°C and wear may be higher than standard tires if used in warmer conditions. They are made of a softer rubber compound which retains its flexibility in cold weather, and the tread pattern is also optimised. This may include having more "biting" edges to give better grip and wider gaps to help performance in snow.

- Studded tires.

These are for use in extreme conditions such as thick snow and deep ice. They should be removed when conditions improve as they are likely to damage the road if in direct contact.

- Snow chains. These can be used if snow or ice is encountered during a journey provided they are removed when conditions improve since, as with studded tires, they are likely to damage the road.

- Snow socks. A textile fabric is placed around the tire to improve grip on snow and ice. They tend to be easier to fit than snow chains but may not be as effective in all conditions. They are also less likely to damage the road, but should still be removed when conditions improve as they will wear rapidly and will not perform as well in normal conditions.

Any decision for a motorist to change their tires will depend upon driving conditions and types of journeys undertaken, so motorists who expect to drive in areas where conditions are persistently

cold or where snow and ice is present for long periods may find it helpful to change their tyres in the winter.

The Department for Transport advises that it does not believe there is a strong case for legislation requiring winter tires to be fitted, but consumers can still choose to fit them. Their view is that typically motorists in England will find that that the standard tires fitted to their vehicle have a tread pattern and tire compound that ensures good performance in a wide range of conditions and they can be used throughout the year. Issues such as the costs of purchasing, storing and changing tires at set times each year would need to be balanced against the possible benefits, and that many vehicles in the south of the country would only experience the necessary conditions to gain from these tires on a few occasions each year.

**We do not accept any liability for correctness of the given information.**

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