

## Guidelines for Winter: Winter Tire Laws in Germany

Germany has always had requirements for winter tires during the ice and snow season, but in November 2010, those requirements turned into a much more specific federal law for all of Germany. Here's what you need to know...

### The Law Regarding Snow Tires

In November 2010, responding to the court's decision, the *Bundestag*, Germany's parliament, passed a new federal law that is much more specific about winter tires. It also doubles the fines for drivers caught without snow tires or who have an accident in winter conditions without snow tires on their vehicle.

### From O to O

Most German motorists have long known the old rule of thumb for putting snow tires on the car: "von O bis O." The term "from O to O" is short for "from October to Easter" (*von Oktober bis Ostern*). It is a recommendation that one should make the change from regular tires to snow tires in October, and leave them on until Easter.

The new German law does not set any time limits, but it does clearly state that under icy conditions (ice, packed snow, slush, black ice or frost, etc.) you must not drive without snow tires on your vehicle. So, since it's difficult to predict the weather, for all practical purposes, the old "von O bis O" rule still applies. **In Austria, winter tires are mandatory from November 1 to April 15.**

The new law also spells out what a "winter tire" is. Specifically, it is an *M+S-Reifen*, a mud-and-snow tire that has an official M+S (*Matsch und Schnee*) marking on it. (M+S tires do not have to be "winter" tires. All-year or all-weather M+S tires also qualify.) The German automobile club ADAC recommends going a step further and getting tires with the "three-peak-mountain" seal, an indication of snow tires that meet the highest standards.



ADAC also makes another recommendation that goes beyond the minimum requirements of the law. While the German Road Traffic Ordinance (*Straßenverkehrsordnung (StVO)*) requires a minimum snow tire tread depth (*Profiltiefe*) of 1.6 mm, ADAC ups that to 4.0 mm.

### Fines

If the police catch you driving in winter conditions without M+S tires, you'll have to pay a fine (*Bußgeld*) of €40. If you are involved in an accident or you block traffic in icy conditions without M+S tires, the fine goes up to €80.

### Rental Cars

The snow tire law applies to all drivers, even if they do not own the vehicle! That means if you are renting a car in Germany in the winter, make sure it has M+S tires. The law also applies to motorbikes, trucks and buses.

**Source of information: The German Way & More and German Automobile Club ADAC**