

The Dumb Driver Dilemma – Drivers Who Can't Resist a Closed Road

In the winter, snow closes roads; in the spring and summer, it is flooding conditions. Most drivers, when they come upon a barricade with flashing lights and a big “ROAD CLOSED” sign, do not proceed past the sign into the unknown. But enough drivers shrug their shoulders and barrel past the sign to earn the title “dumb driver”.

In an emergency, these “dumb drivers” not only endanger themselves but waste precious resources and disrupt the entire crisis management system. They drive law enforcement and fire department rescue squads nuts.

Drivers who ignore closed roads and then abandon their cars during snow storms cause snowplow drivers to stop and dig out each car before they can continue cleaning the road. In North Dakota, some of the worst offenders were drivers with cell phones. Cell phone owners reasoned that they could call for help. In 1997 when North Dakota officials received calls from cell phone drivers, the officials made sure the drivers had a working phone and fuel. Then officials told the drivers to sit tight and they would be rescued after the storm passed.

Joyriding to see how high the water is or to try to make it across the road are more examples of “dumb driver dilemma”. We've all seen news accounts of dramatic water rescues of firefighters plucking drivers from their partially submerged cars. Last spring, several Southeast Missouri teenagers lost their lives when they went “joyriding on a levee” to see the Mississippi flooding.

Emergency responders hear all sorts of excuses for ignoring closed road barricades. Sometimes it's curiosity — in St. Charles County, Missouri, responders had to rescue bicyclers along the Katy Trail State Park when the road was suddenly flooded and blocked their route back to the city during the 1995 spring floods.

Sometimes drivers don't think the signs apply to them. In the 1994 Spring flooding, a Kansas man drowned when he drove his car around a barricade at the Blue River in the Kansas City area.

People in four-wheel drive vehicles often ask officers to let them go through. The following is reprinted from the Missouri department of Transportation publication, **Water Over the Road** which detailed the department's efforts after the 1993 flooding.

St. Joseph district maintenance worker Gene Simpson was telling motorists the road ahead was closed due to two to three feet of water over the road. But one driver insisted he was going through anyway and his passengers agreed. Simpson couldn't change the driver's mind, so the car drove down the road.

Simpson then went back to work warning other motorists of the flooding hazard ahead. About 45 minutes later, he looked up and saw the same vehicle returning from the closed section. It was coming toward him with all four doors open, and the driver was swerving the car from side to side in an attempt to “slosh” the water out of the floor.

The passengers weren't happy about this turn of events. As they drove past Simpson again on their way out of the area, he heard them telling the driver, “When the man says there's two to three feet of water on the road, he means it!”.

Flash flooding and flood related vehicle deaths are tragic.

“Here are a few tips to keep drivers safe”

A **flood watch** means there has been enough rainfall to cause a flood.

A **flood warning** means there will be flooding.

The Dumb Driver Dilemma – Drivers Who Can't Resist a Closed Road

In the winter, snow closes roads; in the spring and summer, it is flooding conditions. Most drivers, when they come upon a barricade with flashing lights and a big “ROAD CLOSED” sign, do not proceed past the sign into the unknown. But enough drivers shrug their shoulders and barrel past the sign to earn the title “dumb driver”.

In an emergency, these “dumb drivers” not only endanger themselves but waste precious resources and disrupt the entire crisis management system. They drive law enforcement and fire department rescue squads nuts.

Drivers who ignore closed roads and then abandon their cars during snow storms cause snowplow drivers to stop and dig out each car before they can continue cleaning the road. In North Dakota, some of the worst offenders were drivers with cell phones. Cell phone owners reasoned that they could call for help. In 1997 when North Dakota officials received calls from cell phone drivers, the officials made sure the drivers had a working phone and fuel. Then officials told the drivers to sit tight and they would be rescued after the storm passed.

Joyriding to see how high the water is or to try to make it across the road are more examples of “dumb driver dilemma”. We've all seen news accounts of dramatic water rescues of firefighters plucking drivers from their partially submerged cars. Last spring, several Southeast Missouri teenagers lost their lives when they went “joyriding on a levee” to see the Mississippi flooding.

Emergency responders hear all sorts of excuses for ignoring closed road barricades. Sometimes it's curiosity — in St. Charles County, Missouri, responders had to rescue bicyclers along the Katy Trail State Park when the road was suddenly flooded and blocked their route back to the city during the 1995 spring floods.

Sometimes drivers don't think the signs apply to them. In the 1994 Spring flooding, a Kansas man drowned when he drove his car around a barricade at the Blue River in the Kansas City area.

People in four-wheel drive vehicles often ask officers to let them go through. The following is reprinted from the Missouri department of Transportation publication, **Water Over the Road** which detailed the department's efforts after the 1993 flooding.

St. Joseph district maintenance worker Gene Simpson was telling motorists the road ahead was closed due to two to three feet of water over the road. But one driver insisted he was going through anyway and his passengers agreed. Simpson couldn't change the driver's mind, so the car drove down the road.

Simpson then went back to work warning other motorists of the flooding hazard ahead. About 45 minutes later, he looked up and saw the same vehicle returning from the closed section. It was coming toward him with all four doors open, and the driver was swerving the car from side to side in an attempt to “slosh” the water out of the floor.

The passengers weren't happy about this turn of events. As they drove past Simpson again on their way out of the area, he heard them telling the driver, “When the man says there's two to three feet of water on the road, he means it!”.

Flash flooding and flood related vehicle deaths are tragic.

“Here are a few tips to keep drivers safe”

A **flood watch** means there has been enough rainfall to cause a flood.

A **flood warning** means there will be flooding.