The Hidden Risks of Fall Leaves

While autumn foliage brings vibrant color to neighborhoods and roadways, fallen leaves create significant seasonal hazards. Beyond blocking scenic views, unmanaged leaves present serious risks to driving safety, local infrastructure, and environmental health.



Roadway and Driving Hazards

Freshly fallen leaves covering roads look peaceful, but they can create hazardous driving conditions:

- Slippery Surfaces: Wet leaves possess a waxy coating that can become nearly as slick as ice, causing tires to lose traction during braking and turning.
- Increased Stopping Distances: Just like driving on snow, stopping on leaf-covered pavement takes significantly longer.
- Hidden Obstacles: Piles of leaves can mask deep potholes, lane markings, and early-season patches of ice.

Neighborhood Drainage and Infrastructure Risks

When leaves accumulate along curbs and wash into storm drains, they block vital drainage pathways:

- Flooding: Heavy autumn rains combined with clogged storm drains leave water nowhere to go, backing up onto streets and yards to threaten property.
- Surface Wear: Obstructed drainage systems place extra strain on public works and accelerate wear on roads and sidewalks.
- Tripping and Vehicle Hazards: Wet leaf piles along curbs can conceal depressions, storm grates, and potholes that catch car tires and trip pedestrians.

Environmental Water Quality Concerns

Leaving organic debris to decompose in storm sewers causes environmental harm:

- Nutrient Runoff: Decaying leaves release nitrogen and phosphorus into storm sewers.
- Algal Blooms: These excess nutrients flow into local streams and lakes, triggering harmful algal blooms and low-oxygen zones that damage aquatic wildlife.

Prevention and Safe Disposal



Proper management prevents seasonal hazards and protects communities:

- Drive Defensively: Slow down on leaf-covered roads, brake gently, and increase your following distance.
- Keep Leaves Out of the Street: Avoid blowing leaves into the road, which violates local ordinances and clogs drainage.
- Bag or Mulch Properly: Place leaves in approved bags for curbside collection or mulch them to return natural fertilizer to lawns while preventing gutter clogs.
- Adopt Local Drains: Routinely clear leaves away from neighborhood storm drains to keep water flowing freely after storms.

For more information on the Hidden Risk of Fall Leaves, visit:

drivesafeonline.org/defensive-driving/autumn-driving-dangers/

https://yourcleanwater.org/yard-waste-disposal/

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