
John Vincze: Chain law needs to be for everyone

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I have lived in Summit County for over six years and have spent more than my share of time going through the tunnel in all kinds of weather. Before coming to the high country, we lived in California and made the pilgrimage over Donner Summit to Tahoe skiing every weekend. My recommendations for fixing the regular snafus that seem to occur are as follows:

When chain control is in effect: It is for everyone.

Large trucks that try and sneak up to the pass without chains seem to end up causing most of the problems. I have actually asked truckers why and how they got this far without chains and gotten some incredible answers. Based on my smallish sample size, I can't tell you which part they did not understand. The reward if you get to the tunnel without chains, when in effect, should be a \$5,000 fine and ticket. A few of those will pay for the fuel in the state patrol fleet for the winter.

It should be for everyone that isn't in a four wheel drive with M+S rated winter tires. Your Subaru or other AWD of choice with all-season tires doesn't cut it.

During peak times such as Friday night and Sunday afternoon, pull the big trucks off the road. As a truck driver, do you really want the stress of driving in these conditions, having to put the chains on, and having your company name on the nightly news because you had to be towed or pushed up the hill?

The chain law should be in both directions. If you needed chains to get up to the tunnel (or over Vail Pass) why wouldn't you want them to go down the other side? Trying to creep down at 20 mph is equally ridiculous.

It only takes one or two highway patrol officers standing on the road in between the lanes with a big flash light checking cars, vans etc for compliance to enforce this approach.

Besides the obvious benefits and reduced costs of not having to deal with these traffic problems and road closures, there are additional benefits as well.

The chains chew up the snow and ice on the road and as a result it almost clears itself. Many times when chain control is in effect on the eastbound approach to the tunnel, this lane is wet but mostly clear and moving, while the westbound lane is still snow covered, slippery and slow.

A business emerges for those willing to put chains on for people (or take them off) in the chain up areas. For those not willing to get on your backs and install your own chains, you hand the chains (which come in a nice plastic box) and \$20 out the window and the problem is taken care of quickly while you are warm and dry inside your car (\$10 to remove them). This was the going rate in California when we left and it may now be more and they did a booming business.

Gas stations and car parts outlets on both sides of the passes and tunnels, sell chains to those who have rental vehicles for their visit as well as anyone else not prepared. If you wait until the Downieville truck stop, expect to pay double.

The final thing we learned after a few misguided attempts in California: On a powder day, stay at the resort and ski your heart out. Don't quit early just to get into traffic with everyone else. Have a nice dinner in town. In the end you will get home at almost the same time, less stressed and have a big smile on your face as a result of the extra runs you got over those parked on their way over the pass.

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