Winter is upon us and with it comes the usual accidents that come from icy intersections, snow-covered sidewalks, low light levels and cold.

You often hear from our local law enforcement folks on how to deal with the ice on the road — slow down and look for other vehicles is the main message — so I thought we might take a few minutes to think about wintertime safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

As we head outside for winter activities, dress in layers and wear boots with nonskid soles. For warmth and stability look for boots that are well insulated and waterproof, have a thick, nonslip tread sole, wide, low heels, and are lightweight.

Wear a bright scarf or hat or reflective gear so drivers can see you. With our short days, it is dark as I go to work and when I come home as well. Unfortunately, many of us have coats in navy, black or gray, which aren’t easy to see when it is dark outside. Choose a bright hat or use sew on or stick on reflectors. When my kids were in grade school, a parent group sewed reflective strips on all the kids’ jackets. Add the same reflective strips to your jackets.

Don't wear a hat or scarf that blocks your vision or makes it hard for you to hear traffic.

When traveling with babies or small children, make sure they are dressed in brightly colored or reflective clothing. If you have to push a stroller or walk in the street, the child should be in front of you and as close to the curb as possible.

As I was headed to work this week, I drove up behind a bicycle I nearly didn’t see. The only reason I spotted him was the small reflectors on the bicycle pedals. Make sure a motorist can see you easily.

Slips, trips and falls are the second most common cause of accidental deaths in the United States each year, second only to traffic accidents. Winter can be a challenging time of
year to get out and about. Freezing rain, icy surfaces and piles of hard-packed snow pose a hazard for the innocent pedestrian.

Just one bad fall on ice can have long-term consequences. These include: chronic pain in the affected area; a disabling injury that may mean loss of independence; or fear of another fall, which discourages a healthy, active lifestyle.

Ice grippers on footwear can help you walk on hard packed snow and ice. But be careful! Grippers become dangerously slippery and must be removed before walking on smooth surfaces such as stone, tile and ceramic tile.

The Canada Safety Council advises that you walk like a penguin:

- Walk flat footed
- Take short steps or shuffle for stability
- Concentrate on maintaining your balance
- Keep your head up and don’t lean forward
- Shorten your stride and walk slowly to safely navigate an icy path
- Point your feet out slightly to increase stability
- Keep your arms at your sides (not in your pockets) to maintain balance
- Do the penguin shuffle

Those of us who have lived in Fairbanks any amount of time call it the Fairbanks shuffle. No matter what you call it, it is an effective way to get around safely on ice and snow.

Be safe as you stay active this winter. Dress warmly, make sure people can see you and watch your step.

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-2426. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.