



News Release

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AAA EXPECTS 7.9 MILLION STRANDED MOTORISTS DURING SUMMER TRAVEL SEASON

Nation's largest motor club encourages all drivers to complete three easy maintenance tasks to help avoid becoming stranded, improve safety and save money on gas

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA., (May 30, 2012) – The summer travel season officially kicked off last weekend, Memorial Day holiday weekend. AAA estimates it will come to the rescue of 7.9 million stranded motorists between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

“Millions of Americans are expected to take road trips during the summer months. Unfortunately, many of them will end up stranded by the roadway,” said Georjeane Blumling, Vice President of Public Relations for AAA Tidewater Virginia. “However, there are three easy maintenance tasks any driver can perform to reduce their chances of becoming stranded, improve the safety of their road trip and even save a little money.”

The three maintenance tasks AAA recommends all motorists perform before hitting the road for a summer road trip include:

1. Inspect All FIVE Tires

Many motorists may be confused when told to check five tires. However, AAA has found one of the most frequently overlooked items on a vehicle is the spare tire. When inspecting tires, it's important to know if your vehicle even has a spare. If so, be sure it is properly inflated and stowed. If you cannot locate a spare tire, ensure your vehicle has an alternate solution. Options include an emergency sealant and inflator kit or run-flat tires that allow the car to be driven to a safe location.

“Roughly 1.1 million drivers will call AAA for help with a flat tire during the summer travel season. Many of those problems could be avoided by inspecting the tires and being prepared before hitting the road,” said Blumling. “Tire inspections are simple to perform. The only tools needed are a quarter and a tire pressure gauge.”

Begin every tire inspection with a pressure check. “Eighty-five percent of drivers do not know how to properly inflate their tires. As a result, more than half of all cars on the road have at least one under-inflated tire,” explained Blumling.

Always check tire pressure when the tires are cold and the car has not been driven recently. Use a quality gauge to make sure all five tires are inflated to the pressures recommended by the vehicle manufacturer, which is probably *not* the maximum pressure molded into the sidewall of the tire. The carmaker's recommendation can be found on a sticker usually attached to the driver's door jam, in the owner's manual and sometimes on the gas cap door. Drivers should be aware that the recommended pressures for front and rear tires may differ, and the spare may require yet another pressure. Most space saver spares require much higher air pressures than normal vehicle tires.

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Properly inflated tires also can reduce fuel costs during a trip. The Department of Energy reports that correctly inflating all four tires can improve fuel economy by up to three percent, which is equivalent to as much as 12 cents per gallon.

After making sure all five tires are properly inflated, drivers should inspect the tread depth and overall condition of the tires. Worn tires in need of replacement are much more likely to suffer punctures and other problems.

To check tread depth, insert a quarter into a tire tread groove with Washington's head upside down and facing outward. The tread should cover part of Washington's head. If any area above his head is visible, it might be wise to go tire shopping before you take a long road trip. Be sure to check the tread depth at several points around the tire and across its width, and use the lowest reading.

While checking the tire tread wear, also look for signs of uneven wear or abnormal bulges or other damage on the tire treads and sidewalls. "Taking a few minutes to inspect your tires once a month can help keep you rolling down the roadway instead of being stranded by the roadside," noted Blumling.

2. Check and Clean Car Battery

AAA estimates it will assist nearly 1.6 million motorists with dead batteries during the summer driving season, replacing nearly 500,000 batteries at the roadside. Summer heat breaks down car batteries internally and accelerates the rate of corrosion on the vehicle's battery terminals. Both conditions can lead to insufficient electrical power being available, and leave a motorist stranded without warning.

Check the battery cables and ensure they are securely attached to the terminals. Clean the terminals if there are signs of corrosion. It is not enough to simply remove external corrosion. Proper cleaning requires disconnecting the cables to clean the hidden areas where they contact the battery terminals.

Depending on local climate and vehicle usage patterns, most car batteries have a three to five year service life. If a battery is nearing the end of its lifecycle, have it tested at a AAA Approved Auto Repair shop, AAA Car Care Center or by the AAA Mobile Battery Service to determine if replacing the battery before your road trip might be a good idea.

3. Replace Wiper Blades and Refill Washer Fluid

Rain, insects, grime and other debris on a windshield will compromise the driver's vision, and safety, if the wipers cannot remove them. Check the windshield washer fluid reservoir monthly or more often if the washers are used frequently. Top it off with a solution formulated to aid in the removal of insects and other debris. Be sure to test the washer spray nozzles for proper operation and aim before leaving on a trip.

While topping off the washer fluid, also check the wiper blades. If blades are worn, cracked or rigid with age, they will not adequately remove rain, grime and other debris that can obscure driver vision. If the wiper blades are sufficiently deteriorated, the metal wiper blade frame could contact and permanently damage the windshield.

Check the wiper blades at every oil change or whenever they fail to wipe the glass clean in a single swipe. The life of a rubber insert is typically six to 12 months depending on its exposure to heat, dirt, sunlight, acid rain and ozone. Streaking and chattering are common clues that the rubber is breaking down and replacement is needed.

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“While any driver can perform these three simple maintenance tasks before a summer road trip, they are not the only services your car needs to stay in top notch operating condition. It is also important to have your car serviced regularly according to the vehicle manufacturer’s recommended maintenance schedule in the owner’s manual,” said Blumling.

This summer, AAA will remedy over half of motorists’ car problems at the roadside and get them back on the go. However, an estimated 3.4 million drivers will suffer more significant troubles that will require towing to a place of repair. Regular vehicle maintenance can help a motorist avoid becoming one of the unlucky drivers who end up spending part of their summer vacation hooked to a tow truck.

To help consumers identify quality auto repair shops that can assist in the maintenance and repair of their vehicles, AAA offers the Approved Auto Repair program as a free public service. AAA-approved repair facilities meet and maintain high professional standards for training, equipment, cleanliness and customer service. Motorists can look for the Approved Auto Repair sign at local auto repair facilities, or search for a nearby AAA-approved shop online at AAA.com/Repair.

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