



on the ROAD

A supplement of the **Unterrified Democrat** | November 4, 2020

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4 factors to consider to maintain winter safety

Many changes are to be expected as fall gives way to winter. Temperatures drop for much of the country, and depending on where one lives, snow, wind and ice are to be expected.

As beautiful as snow-covered landscapes can be, winter presents unique hazards, notably slippery roads and surfaces. Chilly temperatures also can put people at risk if they spend prolonged periods outdoors unprotected.

According to the insurance company Carsurance, more than 156,000 crashes occur annually due to icy roads. Roughly 17 percent of all vehicle crashes happen in winter conditions. Winter hazards are not exclusive to driving, however. That means winter safety involves a consideration of a host of factors.

1. Changing visibility

While slippery surfaces may contribute to some accidents, visibility can quickly change with winter weather. Blowing snow can contribute to whiteout conditions. In addition, fog can be hazardous to drivers, aviators and mariners and contributes to thousands of travel accidents every year, advises the National Weather Service. It's

important to slow down, leave plenty of distance, use your low-beam headlights, and recognize when it may be safest to pull over, such as when visibility is significantly compromised.

2. Snow removal

Shoveling snow or using a snowblower are common wintertime activities. Yet strenuous levels of activity in cold temperatures could put people at risk of heart attack, particularly if they are not acclimated to physical activity. Always warm up prior to shoveling snow to prepare the body for exercise. Go slowly and take frequent breaks. Avoid twisting and tossing snow over your shoulder, which can contribute to back injuries.

3. Carbon monoxide poisoning

Winter weather means turning up the heat or doing more indoor cooking. Carbon monoxide is produced through the burning of fuel in various forms, including stoves, engines, gas ranges, portable generators, and grills. The National Safety Council says carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can go undetected as it builds up in enclosed spaces. Never warm up the car inside of a contained garage. Do not use

portable flameless chemical heaters indoors, and have furnaces, water heaters and other fuel-burning appliances checked and serviced by a qualified technician annually. Be sure that carbon monoxide alarms are on every floor of the home, and take it seriously if the alarm goes off.

4. Black ice

Black ice is a common winter foe. Black ice forms when temperatures rise above freezing during the day, melting any snow on the ground and causing surfaces to become wet. If the temperature drops once more while the ground is wet, a thin, transparent sheet of ice can form. Black ice also may occur if moisture in the air condenses and forms dew or fog, and then the temperature drops below freezing, says the National Weather Service. Black ice gets its name because it looks black on asphalt roads. However, it also can form on sidewalks and overpasses, or spots shaded by trees or other objects. Slowing down and exercising extreme caution are essential.

Winter is a beautiful season. But it can be just as hazardous as it is awe-inspiring. Taking steps to stay safe in unpredictable conditions is a necessity each winter.

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Develop a vehicle maintenance schedule

The oft-sudden expense of vehicle repairs can throw monthly budgets into disarray. Maintaining a routine service schedule is one way for drivers to keep repair costs down.

The online automotive resources Edmunds.com says many car owners do not adequately prepare for scheduled maintenance, and may not give maintenance a thought until it's too late. The first step drivers take upon purchasing a new or preowned vehicle should be to familiarize themselves with the vehicle's owner's manual, which is filled with valuable information and likely includes maintenance interval recommendations.

Next, drivers should learn about their vehicle, which is particularly relevant when buying a preowned vehicle. Getting to know how the car or truck rides, as well as any sounds it may make, can provide drivers with a solid foundation they can then use to keep their cars running strong.

Routine service typically includes tire rotation, oil changes and topping off of fluids. So just how long between service appointments can a car go? Here are some generalized estimates.

- **Oil change:** Oil chemistry and engine technology have improved so much that most cars can go well beyond the once-recommended 3,000 mile interval between oil changes. Now many vehicle manufacturers recommend between 5,000 and 10,000 miles between changes, advises Edmunds. Drivers should err on the side of caution if they do a lot of stop-and-go driving and short trips. Other drivers may want to invest in vehicles that have oil change maintenance minders built in. A light or countdown will come on the dashboard, indicating when the oil has reached the end of its usefulness.

- **Tire rotation:** Rotating tires helps prolong the life of the tires and alleviates uneven tread and wear. During the rotation, each tire is removed and relocated to a different position to ensure that all the tires will wear evenly. Michelin Tires states that tires should be rotated around every six months, or between 6,000 and 8,000 miles.

- **Vehicle fluids:** Your best bet is to see what the manufacturer recommends in regard to fluids such as transmission fluid, differential oil, brake fluids, coolant, etc. Some transmissions need regular maintenance, while others can go 150,000 miles between changes, according to the vehicle information site The Drive. Coolant typically can last 100,000 miles. For these types of changes, it may be best to go to a mechanic or service center familiar with your make and model rather than a quick-lube center, as knowing when to drain and refill can be more complicated.

Service schedules can be designed to adhere to manufacturers' recommendations and drivers' personal preferences.

How to effectively and safely sanitize a car

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way people live. One readily felt effect was spending more time at home. Vehicles sat idle in driveways and even some automotive insurance providers reduced rates because people were driving much less.

Even with stay-at-home measures in place, people still need to leave their homes to stock up on essentials, such as food or medicine. In other cases, people may have been essential workers who drive for a living, including delivery drivers or health care personnel who were incapable of working from home.

Any time a person goes out in public, he or she runs the risk of contracting viruses. Bacteria and germs may reside on various surfaces, including those inside vehicles.

People want to protect themselves and now are more aware of the importance of frequently cleaning and sanitizing their cars. Keeping a vehicle safe to drive without affecting its upholstery or electronic components is paramount.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention makes a distinction between cleaning and disinfecting. Cleaning refers to the removal of germs, dirt and impurities from surfaces. It does not kill germs, but can lower their numbers. Disinfecting refers to using chemicals to kill germs on surfaces. The following are some ways to deeply clean and sanitize a car.

- **Wash hands.** First and foremost, it is crucial to wash your hands before and after using the car. This can reduce the likelihood of growing ill because of transferred viruses or bacteria.

- **Use rubbing alcohol.** Solutions that contain

70 percent alcohol are effective against many viruses and bacteria, including coronaviruses, says the CDC. Furthermore, Jeff Stout, Executive Director of Global Innovation at Yanfeng Automotive Interiors, says that, for the most part, nearly every interior surface of a vehicle can be cleaned with isopropyl alcohol. Plastic to painted chrome to imitation leather have been tested to ensure they don't degrade when exposed to pure isopropyl alcohol.

- **Avoid bleach or hydrogen peroxide.** While bleach and peroxide are very effective cleaners and sanitizers, they are likely to damage a car's upholstery, according to Consumer Reports.

- **Use soap and water:** Experts say that vigorous washing with a soap-and-water solution can be effective against many contaminants because it breaks down the protective envelope that surrounds coronaviruses and other germs to disarm them. Friction also can help to break down germ cells during cleaning.

"You want to do the best with what you have, so even soap and water can chip away at the risk," says Stephen Thomas, M.D., Chief of Infectious Diseases and Director of Global Health at Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, NY.

- **Address frequently touched surfaces.** Pay attention to the steering wheel, door handles, buttons, touchscreen displays, shift lever, and more when sanitizing. Each of these items can harbor germs.

Deep-cleaning a vehicle has become a necessity since COVID-19 emerged. Frequently cleaning and sanitizing can help make vehicles safer to operate.



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Charge up your car battery knowledge

Vehicles consist of many essential components to keep them running efficiently and effectively. Car and truck owners should have an understanding of how their vehicles function so they can diagnose and address problems as they arise.

Car batteries are an important component of any vehicle. Even though engines

are the powerhouse of any car or truck, without a battery, the engine wouldn't be able to work. According to Firestone Complete Auto Care, car batteries work by providing a jolt of electricity necessary

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Charge up your battery

continued on 4B

to power all the electrical components of the vehicle. This is achieved through a chemical reaction that changes chemical energy into the electrical energy needed to deliver voltage to the starter. In addition to initially starting the car, the battery also keeps electric current steady to keep the engine running.

The battery also works in conjunction with the alternator to power the electronics in the car, according to the automotive information blog Autosessive. While the car is running, the alternator reverses the current produced by the battery, recharging it as a result. This happens during long journeys, so people who drive for short bursts of time may find that their batteries will not have a chance to recharge and may not have the longevity desired.

There is quite literally a lot riding on a functioning battery. No one wants to be caught stranded by a dead battery, so drivers may wonder if there are any indicators that may signal the battery needs replacement.

• Slow turnover: If a vehicle does not immediately start or if the cranking is

sluggish and takes longer to start, it may mean the battery is starting to fail.

• Frequent, short trips: Drivers who make frequent, short trips may find their car batteries do not have time to fully recharge. This, coupled with overtaxing thanks to a lot of accessory use, may cause the battery and the alternator to have shortened life spans.

• Low battery fluid levels: If the fluid level is below the energy conductor inside, it is often indicative of overcharging and excessive heat.

• Corrosion: Corrosion buildup, dust, dirt, and grime on battery connections may cause performance problems. Inspecting and cleaning the terminals can prolong the battery life.

• Odors and leaks: Battery leaks can produce a sulfur odor similar to the smell of a rotten egg. This can become problematic over time, and leaks may indicate an aging or damaged battery.

• Age: Most batteries have a finite life span. A well-maintained battery can last up to five years. Neglect can reduce that life expectancy considerably.

• Bloated or cracked battery case: Replace the battery immediately if the case is cracking, as it could be because excessive heat is swelling the battery.

Understanding how car batteries work can help drivers keep their cars running smoothly.

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Signs transmission fluid is low

Vehicles require all sorts of maintenance to operate safely and efficiently. Contrary to popular belief, motorists need not be amateur mechanics to keep their vehicles running strong.

Major vehicle repairs are best left to the professionals, but drivers can learn to identify the causes of relatively minor issues that, if left untreated, can cause significant damage. For example, vehicles may exhibit certain signs of that indicate their transmission fluid needs replenishing. In many of the following instances, drivers may only need to top off the transmission fluid in their vehicles. However, if issues persist, schedule an appointment with a mechanic.

- **Overheated transmission:** Smoke billowing from a car is a sight no driver wants to see. But as bad as it may look, smoke coming from a car may only indicate the transmission is overheating due to lack of fluid. Smoke also can be indicative of a host of other problems, so if transmission fluid levels are not low, consult a mechanic. Loss of power and a burning smell also may indicate low transmission fluid levels.

- **Erratic shifting:** Drivers can notice how their vehicles shift whether the cars or trucks have automatic or manual transmissions. Transmission fluid may be low if shifts appear to be delayed or faster than normal or if the vehicle appears to be slamming into a new gear. The automotive service provider Aamco notes that shifting issues related to transmission fluid may indicate the presence of a leak. If the issue disappears after refilling transmission fluid but then reappears shortly thereafter, consult a mechanic.

- **Pausing when engaging gears:** A two- to three-second pause when shifting into drive and reverse is another indicator that transmission fluid levels are low. The automotive experts at Firestone note that manual transmissions require fluid to keep gears lubricated, while automatic transmissions rely on fluid to create the hydraulic pressure necessary to power movement within the transmission. When fluid levels are low, shifting from park to drive or reverse can take longer than it should.

- **Slipping transmission:** Vehicles that are not staying in gear also may be in need of transmission fluid. However, a slipping transmission also may indicate significant damage to the transmission has already occurred, so this issue should be brought to the attention of a mechanic.

Low transmission fluid levels can contribute to various symptoms. Keeping an eye on fluid levels and recognizing low fluid symptoms can keep cars running smoothly.

Handle a breakdown with ease

Drivers expect their vehicles to safely transport them from point A to point B. But sometimes drivers find themselves stranded on the side of the road due to a breakdown. That can be an especially precarious position to be in, but knowing what to do during a breakdown can help drivers and their passengers get through such situations unscathed.

1. Find a safe spot to pull over. Whenever possible, guide the car to a shoulder or area out of the line of traffic but still visible to oncoming traffic. If the car is not drivable, enlist the help of someone to push it into a safe zone.

2. Turn on hazard lights. Insurance advises to put on hazard lights, which will warn other drivers that something is wrong. Hazard lights also may alert other motorists who might offer assistance. Once your hazard lights are on, pop the hood, which can serve as an additional alert to other drivers.

3. Engage the emergency brake. Turn the wheel away from the road and put on the emergency brake to help prevent the car from rolling.

4. Set up other warning signals. Prepared drivers keep cones, reflective triangles or flares in their cars. AARP suggests placing three warning signals. The first should be 50 feet away and directly behind the vehicle. The other two can then be placed nearer to the vehicle.

5. Remain in the vehicle. It is safer to stay in the vehicle and call for help than to get out and stand on the side of a busy roadway.

6. Call for assistance. Use a mobile phone to dial a roadside assistance service or tow truck. Drivers also may want to contact the nearest police station to ask for help.

Roadside assistance programs are available for a fee from private companies and sometimes through vehicle dealerships or insurance companies. Such services can provide peace of mind if and when breakdowns occur.



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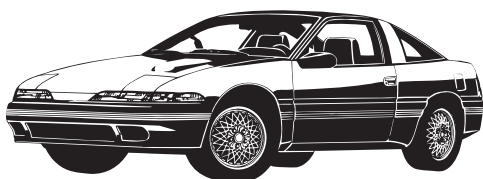
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How older drivers can approach vehicle maintenance and social distancing

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 in the winter of 2019-20 required people of all ages and backgrounds to make changes in their daily lives. Elderly men and women were among the groups the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified as high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19. That forced people 65 years and older to be especially cautious when engaging in otherwise normal activities, including having their vehicles serviced.

In recognition of the threat posed by COVID-19, many auto dealerships and service shops implemented changes to their operations to ensure the safety of their employees and their customers, including those in high-risk groups. Seniors can take additional measures to ensure they stay safe while having their vehicles

serviced.

- Inquire about safety measures. Before booking vehicle maintenance appointments, seniors should call the dealership or body shop to determine what's being done to keep everyone safe. Many such businesses quickly implemented new safety protocols so they should be ready and willing to share this information over the phone. Look for specific information about sanitization practices. Are vehicle interiors being sprayed with disinfectant before and after maintenance appointments? Are employees wearing masks each day? Are employees being checked for COVID-19 symptoms before each shift? These are some of the simple yet effective measures many dealerships and body shops are taking to ensure the safety of their customers.

- Ask about pickup service. Some communities that have reopened are encouraging high-risk segments of the population to adhere to stay-at-home measures. Elderly men and women are still vulnerable to COVID-19 even if the number of reported cases in their towns has decreased. Pickup service, in which a service shop employee will come pick up and then drop off a customer's car once the work is done, can

be a great way for elderly drivers to have their vehicles serviced without going out in public. Even if pickup is not policy, ask if it's possible and request that your vehicle be disinfected upon being returned. If pickup is not an option, ask a younger friend or family member to drive your car in for maintenance in your place.

- Only visit safe facilities. Elderly drivers who must visit a dealership or body shop in

person should confirm that waiting rooms feature socially distant seating. If possible, drop the car off and then go for a walk or find somewhere safe off the premises to read a book or listen to music while the work is being done.

Elderly drivers who need to have their vehicles serviced can take certain steps to stay safe in the era of social distancing.



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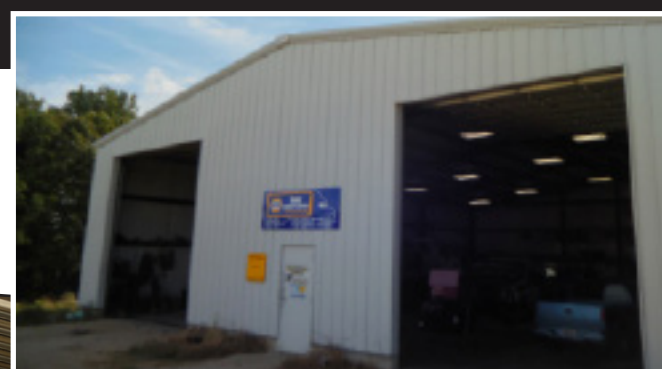
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