

Motorists: Disregarding Auto Repairs Is Dangerous

The power of the dollar doesn't stretch as far as it once did. And it has prompted some motorists to cut back on maintenance or put off needed vehicle repairs due to tight budgets, especially if the vehicle remains drivable. But, delaying certain repairs can be a dangerous gamble for motorists.

Disregarding maintenance on your vehicle can definitely result in costly repairs. However, AAA reminds motorists that ignoring their vehicle's upkeep also can put them, their passengers and others on the road in danger.

Monitor these five areas for safer driving and increased vehicle reliability:

1. Get a grip on traction. Worn tires with little tread are much more likely to hydroplane on wet pavement or lose traction in the snow, resulting in a loss of braking power and steering control – two of the most dangerous situations in which drivers can find themselves.

Insert a quarter upside down into a tire groove. If you can see above Washington's head, start shopping for new tires.

2. Don't suspend needed suspension work. Neglecting to maintain undercar components – especially struts and shock absorbers which wear out as more miles are driven – can cause drivers to lose control on sudden turns or at higher speeds.

3. Put a halt on brake malfunctions. Old brake fluid or low fluid levels can lead to brake fade or failure. Moisture-contaminated fluid also increases corrosion in the brake hydraulic system, which can include expensive electronic anti-lock brake system (ABS) components.

Inspect the brake fluid level at every oil change. If the level has fallen below the "low" mark on the fluid reservoir, it usually indicates major brake wear or a leak somewhere in the system. Seeing a professional cannot wait.

Most vehicle manufacturers recommend replacing the brake fluid every two years to flush moisture and contaminants from the system. Check vehicle owner's manuals for specific recommendations.

4. Don't let fluids checks leak out of your maintenance routine. Leaking fluids mean that your vehicle needs maintenance. Oil, power steering fluid, transmission fluid and brake fluid are all flammable and can burst into flame when they meet a hot engine or exhaust component. Fluid leaks are the number-one cause of vehicle fires.

5. Keep good vision in sight. Motorists need to see the road. Worn, cracked or brittle windshield wipers will limit visibility because they cannot remove insects, grime and other debris from the windshield. A good spray of windshield washer fluid will help wiper blades remove contaminants.

Certified technicians at AAA Approved Auto Repair shops can provide motorists with trustworthy guidance on repairs and vehicle safety. Shops can be identified by the AAA Approved Auto Repair sign, or by searching online at AAA.com/Repair.

John Nielsen joined the AAA executive management team in 1998 as national director of the Approved Auto Repair network. Nielsen has 30 years of experience in the automotive industry. He has held an ASE Master Automotive Technician certification, authored the book "Making Sense of Car Care" and given testimony to the state and national legislatures, and he now serves as Editor in Chief of AAA's new car and truck reviews. He is a regular guest on radio and TV shows throughout the country.