

Topic of the Month: Car Care Awareness

A vehicle is a major investment, so staying on top of regular maintenance is essential to ensuring it runs for years to come. Regular maintenance not only keeps your car safe on the road and helps you avoid expensive repairs, but it also benefits the air we breathe.

October is Fall Car Care Month – an ideal time for a vehicle check-up. This month's Topic of the Month focuses on tips to help keep your vehicle in tip-top shape and get it ready for the colder months ahead.

Maintenance Tips

From a dashboard light to a change in how your car feels on the road, there are small signals your car sends to warn you of bigger problems. Ignoring them can lead to breakdowns, accidents and costly repairs. Here are some tips on how to keep your vehicle in road-ready condition:

- **Check tire pressure and tread.** Regularly checking your tire's tread is a simple yet crucial act of car care. Good tread ensures your vehicle can grip the road, especially in wet or icy conditions, which can cause hydroplaning and skidding. Tire pressure drops when temperatures fall, so always keep them inflated to the manufacturer's recommended level. Ideal tire pressure also leads to better fuel economy and offers less rolling resistance. The penny test is a quick way to check tire tread depth. Insert a penny into the tread with Lincoln's head down, and if you can see the top of his head, it's time to replace your tires.
- **Monitor coolant levels.** Ensuring your coolant levels are where they should be is essential for your car's longevity. Low coolant can lead to engine overheating, which can cause irreversible damage and result in thousands of dollars in repairs. This simple check can prevent a roadside breakdown and a costly aftermath.
- **Treat your windshield wipers and fluid.** Top off your windshield washer fluid reservoir with a winter-specific formula that contains de-icing agents. Standard fluid can freeze in the colder months. Replace worn-out windshield wiper blades with a winter-specific type that resists ice buildup. (And always keep an ice scraper in your car for those frosty mornings).
- **Address "check engine" alerts.** No one likes to see their "check engine" light come on. Many of us fear the worst, assuming the engine is about to go kaput. An illuminated check engine light can mean something minor, like a loose gas cap. But it can also signal the arrival of a major issue with your emissions system. Getting it checked by a professional is always the best move.

Why Proper Car Care Matters

Think of your car as a living being. It requires nourishment, care, and on occasion, a repair or two. Staying on top of proper car care not only keeps your car in good health, but it can also prevent minor issues from turning into cataclysmic failures. An oil change, for example, is far less costly than springing for a new engine.

It's imperative to follow your vehicle's **manufacturer-recommended maintenance schedule**. This outlines when routine services should be performed, such as oil changes, tire rotations, brake inspections and fluid checks.

Neglecting your car's health can also cause environmental issues. Unchecked problems such as poor combustion and exhaust system leaks can lead to increased emissions. An engine that runs inefficiently burns more fuel and releases more pollutants into the air.

Regular tune-ups, tire rotations and leak checks ensure your car is operating as cleanly as possible, helping you contribute to a healthier planet.

If there is a problem with your vehicle, correcting it as soon as it arises keeps your vehicle running safely and efficiently, ensuring both reliability and compliance with environmental standards.

How the Public Can Participate

A good way to monitor the health of your car at home is by purchasing an On-Board Diagnostics II (OBD-II) device, a small plug-in tool that connects to your car's computer system, typically through a port under the dashboard. It monitors various systems in your vehicle, such as the engine, emissions and transmission, and provides real-time data about their performance. By reading this information, the OBD-II device can detect potential issues before they become serious problems. You can find an OBD-II reader at most auto parts stores and online; they can cost as little as \$20.

By taking a proactive approach to car care, you're not just being a responsible car owner; you're making a smart investment in your future.

For more car care tips, visit NTXCarCare.org.