



Are You Maintaining Your Vehicle for Safety?

by Karin Nead

Performing basic safety checks on a vehicle is essential, especially for new drivers who may not recognize the need to examine their car for less obvious safety dangers. Many drivers have their car serviced regularly, which is crucial to ensuring overall reliability. But inspecting your vehicle between these service checks, and especially before long road trips, will go a long way toward maintaining your vehicle and ensuring your safety on the road.

At least once a month, and before any long trip, it's a good idea to check your oil level. Look for the dipstick under the hood; if you're unsure where it is, check your owner's manual. Pull the dipstick out while the vehicle is cool, wipe the stick clean, and then reinsert. Pull the dipstick back out again and check the level. The stick will have a line showing you the acceptable level for your vehicle. If the oil level is low, add the appropriate amount. This will prevent unexpected engine problems while driving. Be sure to change your oil every three months or 3,000 miles as part of your regular maintenance schedule.

At the same time, check your windshield wiper fluid. Serious accidents can be caused by drivers not able to see through glare caused by dirty windshields. Keeping your fluid full allows you to clean your windshield as needed. Be sure to use fluid designed specifically for vehicles; regular window cleaner may freeze during winter months. Clean the inside of the glass as well, especially if the driver or a frequent passenger smokes. Cigarette smoke can cause a film to build up on the inside of the windshield and cause dangerous glare. Also take the time to check the condition of your wiper blades. Be sure there is enough rubber on the blade to sufficiently clear

"Are You Maintaining Your Vehicle for Safety?" is an original article by Karin Nead.

Illustration by Dan C. Rinnert.

Copyright 2004-2005 by Canville Communications.

the windshield during a storm or after using the wiper fluid.

While performing these monthly checks, inspect your tires for tread wear. There should be no less than 1/16 of an inch of tread, or roughly the depth of half a penny. Also check for bald spots or uneven wear. This could signify a problem with the vehicles alignment, which not only causes irregular tread wear but reduces gas mileage. Be sure there are no bulges, bumps or knots. These could lead to blowouts at high rates of speed, causing serious accidents.

Turn on the vehicles lights and walk around the exterior to be sure they are operational, or have someone check for you. Be sure all lights are functional—headlights, high beams, tail lights, brake lights, turn signals (front and back), reverse lights and emergency flashers. Replacing burnt out lights before driving will help other drivers be aware of your movements on the road and reduce the likelihood of rear-end accidents or mishaps during lane changes. Also check that your license plate lights work, as well. Some states will issue a traffic ticket for this offense alone.

Also check the less obvious safety items on your vehicle. Inspect the car's seat belts for proper operation and be sure there are no frays or twists that could jam the belt or lead to a total failure. Check the mirrors for cracks, breaks or discoloration. Make sure your horn is operational. All these little items may not seem like much, but not having them working properly in a crucial situation could lead to a big accident, rather than the minor inconvenience of having to replace the item before driving.

Maintaining a regular maintenance schedule for your vehicle is crucial for operations. But, a regular monthly inspection of your car's less obvious safety features will not only help your vehicle perform better and save you money, but ensure your safety on the road. Encouraging new drivers to perform these procedures on a regular basis will help them establish good safety habits for life.

Karin Nead is the president of Midwest Biz Solutions, Inc. in Belton, Missouri. Her company provides small business owners with outsourcing options for administrative support, bookkeeping, desktop publishing and graphic design.

“Are You Maintaining Your Vehicle for Safety?” is an original article by Karin Nead.

Illustration by Dan C. Rinnert.

Copyright 2004-2005 by Canville Communications.