

The Newberg-Dundee Police Department Traffic Safety Team along with the Newberg Graphic Newspaper has decided to devote a column to traffic safety every quarter. This month we ask, is your car safe for the road ?

Below are a couple of tips to keep your car safe on the roadway for your family, and other drivers.

1) Follow your vehicles service schedule: Many car owners pay little or no attention to vehicle maintenance laid out in the owner's manual. Use the manual as a guideline for service, and don't forget your timing belt or chain. Most cars need to have this replaced every 60,000 to 90,000 miles.

2) Check you engine fluids and tire pressure regularly: This only takes a couple of minutes, and can prevent significant issues. With a rag in hand and the engine cool, pull out the oil dipstick. Wipe it clean, reinsert it and pull it out again for a quick check of your oil, which happens to be the mos important engine fluid. While your under the hood, check the radiator overflow reservoir level and the brake cylinder reservoir. Check the power steering fluid level and, while you're at it, check the hoses and belts for any signs of wear or imminent failure.

3) When the tires are cool, use a pressure gauge to make sure each tire has the proper psi, as described in the owner's manual or in the tire manufacturer's specs. If tire pressure is too low, too much of the tire's surface area touches the ground, which increases friction between the road and the tire. As a result, not only will your tires wear prematurely, but they also could overheat. Overheating can lead to tread separation or an accident. One sign of low tire pressure is if your tires squeal when cornering. Remember to check your tire pressure even if your tires aren't leaking, as tire pressure changes with the temperature outside. You can actually improve your gas mileage by up to 3.3 percent by keeping your tires inflated to the proper pressure.

4) Be on the lookout for new noises, strange smells or anything that just doesn't feel right. If something seems wrong, talk to your mechanic or dealership. If you've been driving your car long enough, you likely know what normal is.

5) Check your vehicle's lights. Vehicle lighting is hugely important, particularly in the colder months. It helps ensure good visibility to other vehicles on the roadway. Many drivers are not aware their lights may be damaged, or burned out, which can cause an unnecessary risk.

Ideally you should do these checks once a week, but in the real world, twice a month would be acceptable. Mechanical failures can be prevented, and keeping these tips in mind can save you a lot of time, extend your vehicle's life, and keep you safe on the road.

The NDPD takes an active approach to vehicle safety. It is our agency's obligation to the community to protect and enhance the livability of Newberg and Dundee, and promote individual responsibility. Please contact us at (503) 538-8321 with any questions.

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