

Emergency Car Kit

The time to prepare for an emergency is before it occurs. Whether it's a flat tire, a mechanical breakdown, bad weather, or a roadside emergency, you should have the following items in your car:

- 12-foot jumper cables*
- Tow rope
- Light sticks, warning triangles, or roadside flares
- Two quarts of oil
- One gallon of antifreeze
- First aid kit* (including an assortment of bandages, gauze, adhesive tape, antiseptic cream, instant ice and heat compresses, scissors and aspirin)
- Space blanket*
- Rain poncho*
- Leather gloves*
- Extra fuses*
- Flashlight and extra batteries*
- Flat head screwdrivers
- Phillips head screwdrivers
- Pliers
- Vise Grips
- Adjustable wrench
- Tire inflator (such as a Fix-A-Flat)*
- Tire pressure gauge
- Rags
- Roll of paper towels
- Roll of duct tape*
- Cable ties
- Bungee cord
- Pocketknife or multi-tool*
- Pen and paper*
- Help sign
- Fire extinguisher
- Foldable shovel
- Tarp
- Cell phone and car charger*
- Bottled drinking water*
- Food such as granola or energy bars*

For cold winter weather, add the following items:

- Ice scraper*
- Warm blankets*
- Chemical hand warmers*
- Winter cap/hat*
- Tire chains
- Bag of kitty litter to use for traction on snow or ice

The asterisk (*) denotes items that should be considered the bare minimum. The more complete your emergency kit, the better prepared you will be to handle a variety of situations. But if you don't have room for everything, at least bring a basic kit.

What to Do When Your Car Breaks Down

Car emergencies are never planned and are usually unexpected. They can occur with a newer low mileage vehicle as well as with an older high mileage one. Proper preparation can make the difference between an inconvenience and a tragedy. For any road trip be sure to do the following:

- Have your vehicle serviced before the trip. Check all fluids and tire pressure, including the spare tire. Check the belts and hoses. Check the lights.
- Make sure the spare tire jack and related tools are in the car, and know how to use them.
- Make sure required documents and paper work is in the vehicle and up to date including appropriate identification, proof of insurance, car registration, emergency contact information, and emergency medical information.
- Know where you are going and bring directions and maps. GPS can be great, but a hard copy backup is always a good plan.

If your vehicle breaks down on the road, do the following:

- Make note of any mile marker or other road signs that can help pinpoint your location.
- If possible, safely change lanes to the right side of the road, being sure to use your turn signals.
- Pull as far off the road as practical while remaining on level ground and on the far right shoulder of the road if possible.
- If a safer location is a short distance away, it's better to risk further damage to your car or tire than to stop in an unsafe location.
- Try to avoid stopping your vehicle on curves or below the crest of a hill where other drivers won't see you from a distance and where getting back into traffic would be more dangerous because you won't see oncoming traffic.
- Remain with your vehicle. Safety experts agree that under most circumstances if you are able to pull away from traffic, it is safest to remain in your vehicle until a law enforcement officer or towing operator arrives.
- In normal conditions, turn on your emergency flashers. At night you can also increase your visibility to other drivers by turning on the car's dome light. Run the motor periodically to recharge the battery.
- In low visibility conditions such as fog and dust storms, turn off all lights and do not put your foot on the brake pedal.
- Don't leave the engine on for extended periods to heat or cool the vehicle. You could put yourself and any passengers at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- If you exit your vehicle, do so from the non-traffic side of the vehicle.
- Avoid standing in front of, behind, or to the traffic side of your vehicle.
- Use your cell phone to call for assistance. If you do not have a cell phone, consider whether a nearby location has a pay phone. It's a good idea to carry extra coins or a prepaid long distance phone card just for emergencies.
- To indicate that help is needed, raise your hood and tie a white cloth to the antenna, or hang a white cloth in a rolled up window on the traffic side of the vehicle.
- If you must accept help from a stranger, ask for identification including name, phone number and address before accepting assistance. Write this information down and leave it with another person, or in the vehicle, explaining where you are going when you expect to return and what you hope to accomplish.
- If you are threatened or harassed while waiting in your car, honk the horn repeatedly and flash the lights to attract attention.