

## How drivers can make road trip season more eco-friendly

Many drivers anxiously await the arrival of spring, when they can rev their engines and enjoy the burgeoning greenscapes synonymous with the season. Though the colors of fall foliage might be more closely associated with road trips, many drivers enjoy the first few warm days of spring when they get a chance to hit the open road with their windows down for the first time in months.

Driving is not always the most eco-friendly activity. However, there are various ways to enjoy spring road trips without compromising the environment.

- Do not idle your vehicle. When engines are running but cars are not moving, this is referred to as "idling." It's hard to blame drivers for idling their vehicles in winter, when many motorists try to warm up their engines and their vehicles' interiors so their morning commutes are as comfortable as possible. Idling cars might not be moving, but they are still burning fuel, meaning drivers who routinely

idle their vehicles are adversely affecting fuel efficiency. It's also important to note that idling is no longer necessary in modern vehicles. That's because the electronic fuel injection systems in today's cars require just a few seconds to get full oil pressure throughout the engine. Such systems were not present in older vehicles.

- Take it easy on the road. Road trips tend to be more enjoyable and are certainly safer when drivers take their time and don't rush to their destination. And driving slowly happens to be more eco-friendly as well. According to the online automotive resource Edmunds.com, gently gaining speed is much more fuel-efficient than accelerating quickly. Always obey speed limits and avoid quickly accelerating when stoplights turn green.

- Empty the trunk. During winter, many drivers understandably carry some extra items in their trunk to account for inclement weather. Keeping ice scrapers, extra coolant or even a snow

shovel in the trunk might make sense for drivers who live in regions that routinely encounter heavy snowfall. When spring arrives, drivers should remove any unnecessary items from their trunks. Such items will increase the weight of the vehicle, thereby reducing its fuel efficiency. Athletes and outdoors enthusiasts should also remove golf bags and sporting equipment from their trunks when taking trips where such items won't be needed.

- Don't top off at the gas pump. Many drivers, especially those on road trips who want to avoid extra tops at the filling station, top off their gas tanks when nozzles shut off automatically. Such a practice is harmful to the planet and may not be doing your vehicle any favors, either. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes gasoline needs some extra room in gas tanks to expand. Without that extra room, the gas may evaporate into the vehicle's vapor collection system, adversely affecting emissions and potentially damaging the vehicle.

Motorists can employ several simple strategies to make spring road trip season more eco-friendly.



Ducts may need to be serviced by professionals in homes where indoor air quality is poor.

## Maintain indoor air quality all year long

Millions of people anxiously anticipate the arrival of spring. Months spent cooped up indoors as temperatures outside dip below freezing can take their toll, and those first warm, sunny days of spring can be just what people need to kick the winter blues.

Winter can be dreary for people confined to indoors as temperatures drop, and poor air quality in a home can add to that dreariness while adversely affecting individuals' health. Air quality tends to suffer most in winter, but there are ways to ensure the air inside a home stays healthy all year long.

- Inspect and address

any sources of carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide, or CO, is an invisible, odorless gas that can contribute to poor indoor air quality and a host of health problems if it goes undetected in a home. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, potential sources of CO in a home include improperly vented natural gas appliances, such as stoves and water heaters, gas-powered tools that are used indoors, clogged chimneys, or blocked heating exhaust vents. Men and women can periodically inspect potential sources of CO and address any issues they find while also mak-

ing sure all CO detectors are properly installed and functioning optimally.

- Inspect HVAC ducts. Ductwork is used to deliver warm or cool air in homes with heating and air conditioning systems. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency notes that much of the dirt in air ducts adheres to the duct surfaces without ever entering living spaces. However, the EPA notes that homeowners should consider having their ducts cleaned if an inspection uncovers substantial visible mold growth. In addition, the EPA recommends homeowners consider cleaning if ducts are infested with vermin or clogged with excessive amounts of dust or debris.

- Avoid chemical cleaning products. Chemical cleaning products may be great at disinfecting dishes, countertops and other areas in the home, but such items may be toxic and adversely affect indoor air quality. For example, chemicals such as bleach and ammonia, which are used in many commercial cleaning products, can linger in the air, irritating the eyes, nose, throat, and lungs. Homeowners concerned about the quality of air in their homes also can avoid scented products, such as air fresheners and scented detergents, which the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health notes may release volatile organic compounds into the air.

- Inspect bathrooms for mold growth. Mold can grow on surfaces that are routinely wet, and that makes poorly ventilated bathrooms common sources for home mold infestations. Mold can adversely affect indoor air quality when mold spores are released, potentially triggering allergic reactions, asthma attacks and respiratory conditions. After bathing in bathrooms without vents, men and women can open windows so the room dries before mold can grow. In bathrooms with vents, make sure vents are running during baths and showers and afterward until ceilings, walls and floors appear dry.

Poor indoor air quality can be easily addressed to ensure individuals stay healthy throughout the year.

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## Protect vehicle paint finish

Perhaps nothing ages a car or truck more than a lackluster exterior finish. Even if vehicles are only a few years old, failure to maintain the paint, tires and chrome accents can make them look worn beyond their years, potentially affecting resale value.

The environment can be a vehicle's worst enemy. Protecting a car means being mindful of substances and habits

that can compromise the exterior finish.

### Seek shade

Over time, the sun can damage a vehicle's paint job through oxidation and premature fading. People who live in areas with especially warm climates may see the paint on their vehicles suffer considerable damage thanks to the sun.

One of the easiest ways to protect a vehicle from the sun is to use sheltered parking or park in the shade whenever possible. This can help protect the paint, headlights and trim. Drivers should store their cars in their garages overnight and during daylight hours when they are home.

### Wash and dry

It's important to routinely wash vehicles to protect their exterior finish. Use a mild cleanser designed for automobiles and a clean rag or sponge so as not to cause scratches that can cause further damage. Because minerals in tap water can be left behind through

evaporation and may oxidize and damage the paint, it's best to wipe away as much residual moisture as possible with a chamois.

### Paint protection

Waxing can prevent bird droppings, berries, splattered bugs, and more from sticking to the paint and wearing down the finish. Waxes come in paste, liquid and spray. Each type has a different reapplication schedule, so drivers should consult the product instructions.

Vehicle owners also can invest in spray films to further protect painted surfaces. Do-it-yourself products are applied like a spray and then dry to an invisible, durable film. This helps protect against insects, gravel, sand, winter salt, and even road grime. Different manufacturers offer protection films.

It is important to safeguard the exterior of a vehicle to help it look newer longer, protecting the value of the car or truck while also protecting it against the elements.



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