

# Risk *topics*

## Roadside Emergencies (Private Passenger Vehicle)

### **Background**

You're driving your vehicle when you suddenly experience a breakdown ... or hit a patch of ice ... or come upon another accident. Every year federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, as well as private citizens, respond to hundreds of thousands of motorists needing assistance while on the road. With the amount of time we spend behind the wheel, chances are pretty good that all of us will eventually be involved in a Roadside Emergency!

### **What To Do**

Preparedness is the key! Here are several things you can do to lessen your exposures.

**Read Your Owner's Manual:** It provides you with the capabilities/limitations of your vehicle, teaches you how to jump your battery, change a flat tire, replace a fuse, and complete other simple repairs.

**Keep Your Vehicle in Good Mechanical Condition:** Non-commercial vehicles should be inspected at least annually by a qualified mechanic. Regardless of your vehicle, mechanical expertise, or season of the year, it's al-

ways smart to spot-check the things most likely to cause trouble while traveling, i.e., the cooling system, brakes, all fluids, tires, battery, and general handling. If the vehicle "feels funny" or a warning light goes on, have the condition corrected.

### **Slow Down in Adverse Weather:**

Speed limits are posted for driving under ideal conditions. We lose things like traction, depth perception, timing, and our ability to effectively judge a condition when things get wet, dark, foggy, or snowbound. Adjust your speed according to the road/weather conditions.

**Enroll in a First Aid Course:** The information obtained in a first aid course is invaluable and may save a life. Courses are available through local medical facilities, colleges, or through the American Red Cross. Fees are nominal and well worth the investment.

**Maintain an Emergency Kit:** Commercially packaged Roadside Emergency Kits are available from local retailers in a variety of sizes with costs ranging between \$20 and \$80. You can often make your own kit at a considerable savings and customize it to accommodate your driving habits and

**Risk Engineering**

Where standard solutions are the exception



surroundings. We can pack our vehicles to resemble a mobile toolbox or remain a bit more conservative, but always doing so in a "what if" frame of mind.

Build your kit from the following. Items shown can be found in army surplus, auto supply, and camping stores. It is unlikely that you need everything, but the choice is yours.

### **Necessities:**

CB Radio or Cellular Phone is vital when a pay phone isn't around.

De-ditching Tool such as a camping or small snow shovel for digging out of sand/snow.

Flashlights or a spotlight. Consider at least two - one battery operated and one that plugs into your cigarette lighter. Some come with useful features like a tripod or blinking warning light.

Jumper Cables to boost a weak battery. Choose a sincere set being 6 or 4 gauge (the lower the number, the more juice it can carry). Know the correct way to set up a jump (Owner's Manual).

"Space Blanket" is a shiny-sided sheet popular with campers. Lightweight and compact (palm-size when folded), it wards off heat or cold depending on which side is outward.

Reflective Triangles to alert other vehicles that you have stopped by the roadside. Keep at least two in the passenger compartment so they are accessible if you are rear-ended.

Jack and a plywood base to use on unstable surfaces. Know how to use the jack before you need it. If it gives you fits, buy a different kind. Several styles are available.

Tool Kit with the basics: adjustable wrench, screwdrivers, pliers, and hammer. Always include your Swiss Army Knife.

Spares such as fuses, engine belts, wiper blades, light bulbs, and lug nuts.

### **You may also want to carry:**

Canteen of Water or a full plastic bottle for you or the radiator. Consider a folding plastic water bottle.

Vehicle Fluids, including motor oil (twist-off container), windshield washer fluid, antifreeze, brake fluid, transmission fluid, and power steering fluid.

Portable Air Compressor that plugs into the cigarette lighter. Choose one in the 200 psi range for best results. It is more reliable than pressurized cans that promise to inflate flat tires.

WD-40 or a similar moisture displacer to keep moisture from shorting wiring, to keep door locks from freezing, or to loosen stubborn nuts.

Towing Cable preferably supplied with hooks for easier attachment. Nylon is favored (over ropes or chains) as it has a better power-to-size ratio, and it stretches.

Fire Extinguisher rated for gasoline and electric fires.

Siphon Hose to transfer fuel from a full container to an empty one.

Duct Tape sometimes called "gaffers tape" or "duck tape." It sticks to anything and often provides a quick and temporary fix around a leaking radiator hose.

First Aid Kit containing a standard "drug store" collection with an emergency

supply (updated frequently) of any needed medication.

*Miscellaneous* items might include:

Rags, Small Camera/Film, Maps/Compass, Paper Towels, Plastic Garbage Bags, Work Gloves, Umbrella, Spare Gasoline Can Notebook & Pencil, Sunglasses, Trail Mix (Food), Emergency Phone Numbers, Emergency Cash (\$100), Electrical Tape, Epoxy Sealer for Fluid Leaks, "Call Police" Window Sign, Auto Club Membership Card, Baling or Picture Hanging Wire.

**Winter Driving:** Special precautions and considerations are necessary when cold weather hits. State Police Agencies advise us to be prepared to be in the car. It sounds simple, but many motorists ignore the hazards. Remember these simple tips:

- Dress appropriately. Save the tank tops and shorts for warm weather.
- Do not let the level of your gas tank drop below half full.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to arrive.

Emergency winter extras call for an additional coat, hat, gloves, scarf, and boots. Cat litter or sand can be spread over ice and snow to improve traction for getting out of drifts. Also, keep matches, candles, and candy bars in an old coffee can. The candles can be lit in the can for light, warmth, and for melting snow (drinking water). Candy bars will provide energy as you await help.

### **If You Become Disabled**

- Lift the hood (universal sign of car trouble) after pulling as far off of the road as possible.

- Place a "Call Police" sign in the rear window or tie a white handkerchief around your antenna.
- Set up your reflectors at 100 foot intervals behind the vehicle in a zone with a posted speed limit of 35 mph. Increase the interval 50 feet for every 10 mph increase in speed limit. Use care to avoid being struck by oncoming vehicles!
- Call for help. Cellphones have replaced the CB radio as the primary way to obtain emergency help. Each cellular company has instructions for reaching local authorities.
- When calling for help, know where you are. Pay attention to the mile posts on the highway, the name of the street onto which you have turned, and the name of the town displayed on the sign you just passed. Help will arrive faster if it can find you.
- Stay with your vehicle. You are generally safer within a locked vehicle than you are when venturing away from the unit - especially in adverse weather.

### **If You Come Upon Another Accident**

Take some preliminary steps to protect the accident scene. Stop before the accident (if possible) rather than pulling past it. Activate your hazard flashers, and set up your reflectors to guide vehicles around, rather than into the accident area. Your objective is to make others aware of the accident without having them contribute to the problem by driving into it.

Next, determine if emergency medical assistance is needed. Unless you are a trained provider, do not attempt to ren-

der medical aid, but, rather, use your cellular phone to contact authorities. If you don't have access to a phone, flag down a passing motorist to assist. Bear in mind that cellphones may not always work in rural areas having fewer cells. Give the operator your exact location and specify any injuries to aid in dispatching the right assistance.

While waiting for professional assistance, make every effort to keep well-meaning, but untrained, passersby from moving the victim. On the other hand, assistance from those identifying themselves as possessing first aid or emergency medical skills can be welcomed.

### **A Word of Caution**

The possibility exists whereby a stranger may ask for a ride in an attempt to secure assistance. Each instance has its own set of circumstances (both pro and con), so think it through carefully before making a decision.

### **Conclusion**

A proficient driver will be prepared for a roadside emergency. Ideally, this preparation includes a preventive maintenance schedule for your vehicle, a first aid course, a roadside emergency kit, and an action plan.

### **References**

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