

# Problem Prevention Checklist

**Properly maintained vehicles seldom become disabled.** If something does go wrong, certain safety equipment and supplies are helpful. Here are some suggestions:

- Cell phone with charger.
- Pencil and notebook.
- Extra medication.
- Vehicle operating manual.
- Emergency service information.
- Flashlight with extra batteries.
- Drinking water and preserved food.
- Jumper cables and tire pressure gauge.
- Flares, warning triangles or reflectors.
- Signal flag, retro-reflective vest or scarf.
- Windshield-washer fluid and wiping cloth.
- Coolant and fire extinguisher.
- Ice scraper, snow brush and snow shovel, if climate demands.
- Cat litter as a substitute for sand when your vehicle is trapped in snow.
- Heavy gloves and thermal or safety blanket.
- Chemical heat source.
- Candles and waterproof matches.
- Jack with flat board for soft surfaces.
- Lug wrench for changing a flat tire.
- Toolkit including screwdriver, pliers, duct tape and adjustable wrench.
- Umbrella.
- Extra fuses and fan/alternator belt.
- First-aid kit.



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## What to Do When Your Vehicle Breaks Down



**The AAA Guide to Personal Safety**



**Don't wait.  
Anticipate.**

## **Be Smart Be Cautious Be Safe**

### **You can do many things to be a safe driver.**

But it is almost inevitable that at some point, you'll have trouble with your vehicle. Each year, millions of motorists encounter such difficulties. How well you deal with vehicle trouble can have a direct bearing on your personal safety.

If you encounter someone who needs assistance, inquire if they need help. If you experience vehicle trouble, know what to do.

Vehicle operating problems are always an inconvenience, and sometimes they can put you in harm's way. If your vehicle breaks down, your first consideration should be safety for yourself and your passengers. There's no way to absolutely guarantee personal safety. But knowing what to do in such a situation is something you should prepare for in advance, not wait to figure out when you're experiencing the problem.



## **Good Planning Leads to Safer Journeys**

**How you fare when your vehicle fails** is often a matter of how you respond to any given situation. The decisions you make are important and have good and bad consequences. You should anticipate your actions and recognize their impact on the outcome.

Most problems are preventable. So are bad judgment calls. Safety should always be a key part of the decision-making process, regardless of where your travels take you.

To arrive safely at your destination, you need to ensure that your vehicle can go the distance. You also need to be mentally and physically prepared to meet any challenges along the way.

Prevention and preparation are the basic ingredients for a great driving experience. You can enhance that experience and your personal safety when you include awareness and planning.

### **Prepare Your Vehicle**

#### **It's important to maintain your vehicle.**

Otherwise, you could experience an operating failure and unnecessary frustration. Worse yet, a disabled vehicle could lead to a crash with injuries.

- ▲ Get in the habit of conducting periodic safety checks to make sure your vehicle is in good operating condition.
- ▲ AAA/CAA Approved Auto Repair shops offer members free safety inspections when other work is performed on their vehicle.
- ▲ A safety check includes tires, lights, belts, hoses, fluids and windshield wipers.
- ▲ Read your owner's manual to clearly understand which dash lights or signals indicate your vehicle is not operating properly and what to do in such a situation.

- ▲ Before a road trip, contact AAA to arrange for a free test of your vehicle's charging system. This can help determine how much life is left in your battery and if the system needs any repairs.
- ▲ Understand how to use your cell phone to call for assistance. Program your phone with emergency numbers, and keep a written list in your glove compartment.
- ▲ Familiarize yourself with the use of safety flares and other emergency equipment.

## Prepare Yourself

**Just because your vehicle is in good working order** doesn't mean you are ready to go. Whether you're headed across town or across the country, make certain you are rested and alert.

- ▲ Plan your route before you depart. Know where you are going. Tell another person about your plans. Agree to telephone when you arrive. When in doubt, consult a map or obtain a TripTik routing from AAA.
- ▲ Be aware of any adverse weather conditions that may impair safe passage.
- ▲ Be alert to construction areas or other hazards between you and your destination.
- ▲ Realize that traffic patterns vary depending on the time of day, especially in school zones or near shopping centers, entertainment complexes and major places of employment.
- ▲ Minimize distractions. Limit conversations with passengers. Keep music volume moderate, and do not use a cell phone while driving.
- ▲ Be mindful that emergency vehicles may require the right of way at any time.
- ▲ Do not drive while fatigued, under emotional stress or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- ▲ Always buckle up and make sure that passengers, particularly infants and small children, are properly secured.
- ▲ Consider taking a refresher defensive driving course. Contact your local AAA office for more information.



## What to Do When Your Vehicle Breaks Down

**Since your surroundings, traffic patterns and vehicle hazards vary**, it's impossible to establish rigid rules for all conditions. That's why it's important for you to continually monitor and evaluate your own situation and become familiar with some general suggestions and guidelines.

**1 Note your vehicle's location.** If you encounter a problem while driving, make sure you are aware of your surroundings and general location. Know where you are in relation to a major exit or cross street. Look for well-lighted areas. Notice landmarks such as service stations, restaurants, shopping centers and business complexes. If you are on an interstate highway, note the mile marker, last exit number or nearest emergency call box or rest area. You may need this information when summoning assistance.

**2 Assess your vehicle's operating problem.** While driving, be aware of and know how to respond to warning signs such as steering problems or steam or smoke coming from under the hood. Also listen for any unusual noises.

If it's a flat tire, the first rule is not to panic. Signal, slow down gradually and carefully pull onto the shoulder of the road, avoiding any sudden maneuvers.

If you run out of gas or your engine stops, switch on emergency/safety flashers, carefully steer your vehicle out of traffic and let its momentum get you off the road to a safe place. Avoid applying the brakes until necessary.

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**Pull off the road.** On most roads, you should exit onto the far right shoulder, as far off the road as possible while remaining on level ground. If you are driving on an interstate or multiple-lane highway with medians, you may consider the left shoulder, again pulling as far away from traffic as possible.

- ▲ If you get out of your vehicle, proceed carefully and watch for oncoming traffic, especially at night or in bad weather, when visibility is limited.
- ▲ Never stand behind or directly in front of your vehicle. Other roadway users may have trouble seeing you, and you could be struck by another vehicle.

**What if you CANNOT pull off the road?** If your vehicle loses power and is inoperable, switch on safety/emergency flashers. Do not risk personal injury by attempting to push it to a safe location. If you cannot get your vehicle to a location away from traffic, or if you are uncertain about your safety and think your vehicle may get struck from behind, do not stay in your vehicle.



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**Alert other motorists.** Make sure your vehicle is visible to other motorists. Remember they may be traveling at a high rate of speed and must be able to see your vehicle from a great distance to stop or move to another lane.

- ▲ Turn on the emergency flashers, especially at night or during inclement weather.
- ▲ Raise your vehicle's hood. If you have a brightly colored handkerchief or scarf, tie it to the antenna or door handle, or hold it in place by closing it in a window.
- ▲ Place flares or warning triangles to direct oncoming traffic away from your vehicle. If you are experiencing a fuel leak or smell fuel fumes, do not ignite flares or use anything with a flame. Extinguish any lit cigarettes. As a rule of thumb, place the first flare or triangle 10 feet directly behind the side of the vehicle closest to the road. Place the second 100 feet directly behind the vehicle, lining it up with the middle of the bumper. Position the third device behind the vehicle's right side — 100 feet if on an undivided highway, 300 feet if on a divided highway. When doing so, always watch for oncoming traffic.

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**Communicate your situation.** Once you and any passengers are in a safe location, you can notify others of your vehicle breakdown. Make note of surroundings and landmarks, buildings or road signs.

- ▲ If you have a cell phone, immediately use it to call for help. Make the call from inside your vehicle if you are safely out of traffic. Otherwise, do so at a safe distance from the vehicle and roadway.



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**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 road service provider arrives.

- ▲ Always be mindful of your surroundings. At night, carry a flashlight.
- ▲ In some circumstances, when there is no other alternative, you may need to rely on the help of a friendly motorist or passerby. Should this be your only alternative to get help, 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 choose to exit the vehicle, do so safely and well away from oncoming traffic and your vehicle. If possible, you and any passengers should exit through the side of the vehicle facing away from the road. In most cases, the passenger side of the vehicle allows for greater distance from oncoming traffic.
- ▲ If you determine help is within walking distance, think about whether it's safe to leave your vehicle or passengers for a short period of time. Assess traffic conditions and ensure that your contemplated route is safe for pedestrians. If you leave your vehicle, place a note on the dashboard listing where you are going for help and the time you left.
- ▲ If you choose to stay inside your vehicle, keep the windows almost closed and the doors locked. It's very dangerous to lower your windows or open your vehicle doors to strangers. If a stranger does stop to offer help, ask the person to call for emergency road service.

- ▲ If you are threatened or harassed while waiting in your car, honk the horn repeatedly and flash the lights to attract attention.
- ▲ 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.

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**What to expect from emergency road service.**

AAA roadside technicians can provide fuel, change tires and boost a battery. AAA battery services include testing and replacement, if the member wishes. In other instances, technicians can employ basic roadside problem-solving techniques to get the vehicle going without the need for a tow. If the breakdown is due to more severe mechanical or electrical problems, the vehicle will need to be towed to a service center.

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**What to tell the emergency road service operator or repair garage.**

Have the following information ready when you call AAA/CAA or other service providers. It may be helpful to write it down. The more accurate and thorough you are, the easier it will be for the service provider to assist you.

- ▲ Your AAA/CAA membership number or insurance information, if applicable.
- ▲ The phone number where you can be reached.
- ▲ Your location — exact address or nearest intersection or exit number.
- ▲ A description of your vehicle — color, make, model and year.
- ▲ License plate number.

You also should:

- ▲ Describe as thoroughly as possible the nature of the problem.
- ▲ Describe your location, noting street signs, mile markers, landmarks, buildings and road signs. Have your license plate number ready, along with a vehicle description.
- ▲ Make certain the service provider is aware of any circumstances that may require special towing or transport considerations, such as unusual vehicle, large number of passengers, infants and medical needs and whether your vehicle uses diesel or an alternative fuel.
- ▲ Tell the service provider the repair shop where you want your vehicle taken. If you don't have one in mind, ask the operator if there is a nearby AAA Approved Auto Repair facility.

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### **Determine how long you have to wait.**

Your service provider should be able to give you an estimated time of arrival. Depending on the circumstances, it could take as little as a few minutes or as long as several hours.

- ▲ If you are in a remote area, or the breakdown occurs late at night or in severe weather, be prepared for a longer wait.
- ▲ If you feel you are in an unsafe situation, make sure the dispatcher is aware of your concern.



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### **What to do when help arrives.**

Reputable firms have trained personnel who understand what to do in most situations. It's important to remain calm and cooperative.

- ▲ AAA service personnel should display an approved AAA/CAA emblem on their vehicles or produce identification.
- ▲ Verify the name of the garage or the provider if you have any concerns.
- ▲ Do not attempt to help the service representative unless he or she asks for assistance.
- ▲ You may ride with the service provider, but not in your disabled vehicle.

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### **Know your rights and responsibilities.**

It's your responsibility to understand what services your emergency road service or insurance policy will cover.

- ▲ Some policies allow for direct billing by authorized road service providers with minimal or no charge to you. Others require you to request reimbursement after paying the full cost of the service call.
- ▲ If you call AAA/CAA for assistance but are not a member, you may be required to pay the entire cost of the service call, either with cash or a credit card. Checks are seldom accepted.
- ▲ Some road service plans only cover specific vehicles. AAA/CAA covers the member regardless of the vehicle driven, even if the member is a passenger.
- ▲ Always get a receipt.
- ▲ It's your responsibility to pay for repairs made to your vehicle.