

Potholes pack a powerful punch

by Bend Weekly News Sources

It's the time of year for potholes and chances are there's one out there with your name on it. When you hit a pothole, it's important to check the vehicle's tires, wheels, steering and suspension, and alignment. Drivers can visually inspect tires and wheels for damage, but the Car Care Council recommends that a professional technician check out steering and suspension and alignment problems.

The steering and suspension are key safety-related systems. Together, they largely determine your car's ride and handling. Key components are shocks and/or struts, the steering knuckle, ball joints, the steering rack/box, bearings, seals and hub units, and tie rod ends.

Signs that the steering and suspension have been damaged include loss of control, swaying when making routine turns, bottoming-out on city streets or bouncing excessively on rough roads.

If there's an alignment problem, the car will pull in one direction instead of maintaining a straight path and there may be uneven tire wear. Proper wheel alignment is important for the lifespan of tires and helps ensure safe handling.

"After hitting a pothole, most drivers wonder, 'is my car OK?' Rather than guessing, the best course of action is to have the vehicle immediately inspected for less obvious damage," said Rich White, executive director, Car Care Council.

As a general rule of thumb, steering and suspension systems should be checked at least once a year and wheels should be aligned at the same interval. Motorists who live in areas where potholes are prevalent should be prepared to have these systems checked more frequently.

Potholes occur when water permeates the pavement -- usually through a crack from wear and tear of traffic -- and softens the soil beneath it, creating a depression in the surface of the street. Many potholes appear during winter and spring months because of freeze-thaw cycles, which accelerate the process. Potholes can also be prevalent in areas with excessive rainfall and flooding.

The Car Care Council is the source of information for the "Be Car Care Aware" consumer education campaign promoting the benefits of regular vehicle care, maintenance and repair to consumers. For more information, visit <http://www.carcare.org/>.

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