

Motorists, Passengers at Risk in Extreme Summer Heat

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Summer heat can be as brutal on a vehicle and its occupants as the most chilling winter weather, according to AAA Idaho, which reminds motorists that the temperature in an overheated car can turn deadly dangerous in a matter of minutes.

"An unattended small child or a pet is defenseless against the heat in an unattended or locked car, and the common reasons for a car overheating in the first place can put all occupants at risk of heat stroke," said AAA Idaho spokesman Dave Carlson.

Carlson said about half of the 115,000 calls AAA will handle in Idaho and Oregon this summer will involve problems requiring a tow. Overheating is one such problem. Cars overheat for a variety of reasons: driving in slow-moving traffic during hot weather, with the air conditioning running; driving up long, steep hills; a loose or broken fan belt; a broken water pump or hose; insufficient coolant or antifreeze in the cooling system; a stuck or broken thermostat; or a clogged radiator.

"Our concern is for the motorist first, then his vehicle, but obviously one affects the other in a dangerous situation where heat stroke can overcome a motorist and his passengers," Carlson said.

Heat stroke is an immediate danger marked by weakness, dizziness and profuse sweating. Reacting quickly to get back on road requires quick thinking. The motoring organization advises drivers to open the doors and windows if the vehicle breaks down and to use a sunshield, if available, to minimize heat buildup.

AAA Idaho also offers the following tips if your car is running but is overheating:

• If your car overheats when you're driving turn off all the accessories, especially the air conditioner.

Â· If you are stopped in traffic, turn on the heater fan, put the transmission in neutral, and run the engine at fast idle. This will not solve the problem, but it will draw heat from around the engine block, cooling the radiator.

Â· If the temperature gauge continues to show hot, or the warning light stays on, signal and pull off the road. Raise the hood, let the engine cool and call for emergency road service.

Â· If there is no steam or smoke coming from the engine, note whether there is a broken hose or belt, and determine if the radiator overflow tank is empty.

Â· Do not touch the radiator! When the engine has cooled completely, check the fluid in the radiator overflow tank again. If low, add coolant and water in a 50/50 mix. Using cold water could crack the engine block.

Â· Start the engine and let it run at idle as you add the coolant.

Â· A broken belt or burst hose, or some other problem, including one with your car's air conditioning system, will generally require a tow.

Â· Act quickly to protect you and your passengers.

Carlson said avoiding roadside emergencies in the first place is preferred. During the hot, dog days of summer, problems involving engine coolant, the car's air conditioning system, the battery, and engine oil plague motorists. Each could be minimized or avoided by having a qualified technician service the vehicle before traveling.

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