

Preparing vehicles for winter weather

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Cold weather is hard on cars and trucks and usually causes at least one vehicle around the farm or home to have poor-starting problems. Bob Schultheis, University of Missouri Extension natural resource engineering specialist, offers the following checklist to ensure your transportation starts and runs smoothly throughout the winter.

Battery - Remove cell caps (if possible) and check the acid level. Add distilled water until the liquid "puckers" in the fill hole of each cell and then replace the caps. Remove the battery cables and clean any whitish or greenish corrosion from the terminals, cable ends and battery top using a baking soda and water paste. Rinse with water and dry the battery surface. Scrape away oxide buildup on the electrical connections using a wire brush or knife. Reattach the cables and spread a thin film of grease on them to slow future corrosion.

Antifreeze - Because the corrosion inhibitors wear out from heavy loads, high engine speeds and hard service, the engine coolant should be drained every two years and replaced. Also replace any radiator hoses and fan belts that are over four years old to avoid sudden failures. Refilling the radiator with a 50/50 mix of antifreeze and water will give engine protection down to minus 34°F.

Tires - Colder temperatures cause tire air pressures to drop. Inflate to the pressures recommended in the vehicle owner's manual. Longer tire life and better gas mileage are possible at higher pressures, but do not inflate beyond the maximum pressure printed on the tire sidewall.

Engine oil - For longest engine life, change the crankcase oil and filter according to the "severe service" maintenance schedule in the vehicle owner's manual. Use a multi-grade oil, such as SAE 10W-30 or 5W-50, to give easier winter starting. The owner's manual will give the recommended SAE grade and API service classification number.

Windshield washer/wipers - Use a washer fluid that gives freeze protection. Check the washer nozzles for plugging and aim. Replace weather-worn wiper blades (usually those over a year old). Scrub the windshield clean of grit and grime before running the new wipers to avoid damaging the new blades.

Tuneup - If hard starting persists, get the vehicle tuned up. Check or replace air, fuel and smog filters. Clean and re-gap spark plugs. Vacuum-check the engine and fine-tune any electronic carburetion controls.

For more information on winter weather preparedness, contact your county University of Missouri Extension Center, or check out the resources on the Web at extension.missouri.edu/cemp/.