


6 Ways the Cold Affects Your Car (and what to do about it)

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The cold weather is harsh on your car. In order to avoid expensive repairs – and dangerous accidents – check out what the sub-zero temperature can do to your car, and what you can do to help prevent problems.

Tires Harden and Lose Pressure

A couple different things can go wrong with tires when cold weather strikes. First, tire pressure will vary according to temperature. A drop in temperature can cause your tires to quickly deflate – this is noticeable even when driving at night compared to driving during the day. Check your recommended tire pressure when the weather starts to get chilly. Also keep in mind that many tires are still made with rubber materials, and these materials will harden when the weather gets cold. This can cause tread and gripping problems in all-season tires. Winter tread tires are designed to resist this problem with alternative materials – another good reason to consider switching to winter tires.

Battery Troubles

When the weather gets seriously cold, your battery may struggle to operate correctly. This is caused by low temperatures interfering with the way that a battery operates and in some cases actually leeching away voltage, reduce the charge that a battery has to get a car started. The last thing you want in the middle of winter is to go out and find your car has a dead battery. There are several ways to avoid this problem. In the coldest areas, consider using available car heaters. Make sure your battery is not too old – most batteries are in their peak condition for around 3 years. When the temperature starts dropping below zero, try to keep your car in a garage as often as possible.

Engine Fluids Thicken When Cold

While most of the fluids in your car have additives to keep them from freezing, this doesn't mean they aren't affected by freezing temperatures. When the weather gets cold fluids grow sluggish, thickening and moving more slowly. This is most dangerous when it comes to transmission fluid, which needs to move effectively to manage car performance. However, sluggish brake fluid can also be disastrous. Even oil can thicken and struggle to perform. Check your fluids and replace or top off as needed.

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Heaters Delay Engine Warm Up

Your engine really doesn't like cold weather. It will struggle to run efficiently when the temperature drops below zero, using a lot of gasoline very quickly to keep itself from stalling. Not only does this lower efficiency, but it also causes the build-up of water vapor. This is especially noticeable if you only run your engine for half an hour or so at a time. Try leaving your car running to stabilize your engine and get rid of accumulated water vapor. Heaters will also sap heat away from your engine, so avoid immediately turning on your heater when starting your car.

For the same reason that batteries tend to struggle in cold weather, spark plugs may also be in danger. Electricity simply does not fare well in cold, dry condition, and older spark plugs will only make conditions worse. So, before the coldest weather starts, check out your spark plugs for any sign of corrosion or age and replace them if necessary.

Windshield and Wipers Vulnerable to Damage

Windshields are very durable in modern cars, but some windshields may still be in danger of cracking, especially when mistreated in cold weather. Use the right kind of coolant, never wash with hot water in cold weather, and take special care of your wipe blade so that they don't freeze to your windshield. This can be aggravated if other cars are kicking up a lot of slurry into your windshield, especially slurry made with rock salt or similar components.

Engine Block Vulnerable to Cracking

Older or more delicate engines may also be in danger of cracking if the engine block is vulnerable to sub-zero temperatures and your coolant is contaminated or inferior. Keep that coolant topped off and use the recommended formula!



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