

# Opinion: Paying attention to vehicles can prevent a wildfire

By Teri Mizuhara

Did you know that keeping your vehicle up to date on its maintenance schedules can prevent wildfires? Yes, by making sure all your vehicles are in good working order you can reduce the potential of wildland fires occurring.

Recent examples of wild fires caused by vehicles are clearly visible in El Dorado County along Highway 50, Bass Lake Road, Gold Hill Road and Cameron Park Drive. In Amador County recent fire scars can be seen along highways 49 and 88 and Ridge Road where vehicles caused strings of wildland fires.

“When a vehicles engine is not well maintained, the exhaust system can become overtaxed thereby allowing fuel to enter the exhaust system which in turn overheats the catalytic convertor that melts and disintegrates. Pieces of the catalytic convertor exit the muffler at about 1200°F and can bounce into the dried grass along the edge of roads and start fires” says fire equipment manager Scott Hogan of the Amador-El Dorado Unit of CalFire.

“Another common cause of wildland fires occurs when tires that are improperly inflated (too little or too much pressure) blow out and literally shred into pieces and bounce off the road coming to rest in the dried vegetation which during summer months can catch fire. You can see an example of this in El Dorado County along Highway 50 in Placerville near the Ray Lawyer overpass,” says fire investigator Capt. Spec. Tom Oldag. “The fire along the westbound lane of Highway 50 in Cameron Park occurred when a transmission failed and dropped out of a vehicle being towed.”

Towing vehicles, boats, campers, Jet Skis, etc., place added stress on a vehicles transmission and when that transmission hasn't been properly maintained it can spell disaster.

Dan Stark of the California Highway Patrol adds, "If someone is having car trouble, we encourage them to find a safe place to stop, such as a paved shoulder or parking area. They should avoid pulling off into the weeds if at all possible because this can cause a fire. Drivers should also be wary of driving long distances on a flat tire because the tire will detached from the rim and could cause a fire under the right circumstances. Best practice is for the driver to drive a short distances at slow speeds to find a place to park."

Hogan said, "Driving is something we do all the time, however we don't always give it much thought. A well maintained vehicle helps ensure that you won't end up on the side of the road with a trail of fires behind. This also saves you money, the better the engine runs the less fuel is wasted."

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