

Opinion: Don't let your vehicle start a fire

By Teri Mizuhara

Keeping your vehicle up-to-date on its maintenance schedules can prevent wildfires.

By making sure all your vehicles are in good working order you can help reduce the potential of wildland fires occurring in California.

Recent examples of wild fires caused by vehicles are clearly visible in El Dorado County along Highway 50 below the Apple Café in Placerville, along Highway 50 near Cedar Heights Drive and along Highway 50 near Carson Road and in Amador County on Highway 88 and Toyon Road in Pine Grove.

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 while you are driving. Pieces of the catalytic convertor exit the muffler at about 1,200 degrees and can bounce into the dried grass along the edge of roads and start fires

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. And finally, 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.

Frank Rodriguez of the California Highway Patrol said, "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 short distances at slow speeds to find a place to park.”

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.

Teri Mizuhara is the public information officer with the CalFire unit that serves El Dorado County.