

Car Care Corner

Planning In Advance Makes It Easier Than Ever To Go Over The River And Through The Woods

(NAPSA)—Along with the dewy daybreaks and colorful canopies of autumn come the hustle and bustle of back to school, the kickoff of the football season and, of course, the stress of holiday travel. By ensuring that your vehicle's systems are up to speed and you've connected the dots between points A and B, you don't have to let the cooler weather slow you down. Here are a few simple tips to help keep you and yours safe and sound, while taking the stress out of fall travel:

- **Plan your route ahead of time.** For longer trips, you should always share your travel itinerary with others. According to the American Red Cross, you should tell a friend or loved one where you're going, your planned route and when you anticipate arriving. Travel-planning software such as Microsoft Streets & Trips helps you plot your course and determine your travel time based on driving habits and preferences. Once your trip is planned, you can e-mail your itinerary to friends or family for added security while you're on the road.

- **Proper vehicle maintenance is key.** A quick check of your vehicle's weather-sensitive systems will save you the headache of getting stuck on the shoulder of a snowy mountain pass. Check that fluids are at the proper levels and concentrations. A lack of coolant or windshield wiper fluid could throw a monkey wrench in your travel plans before you even hit the road.

- **Wet roads mean longer stopping distances.** Whether you're driving the kids to soccer practice or cruising down the freeway to Grandma's house for Thanksgiving, rain, oily buildup and wet leaves on roadways greatly increase the amount of time required to stop. Make sure your tires have plenty of tread: According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, that means no less than $\frac{1}{16}$ inch. As a rule of thumb, you can measure this depth by placing a penny in the tread with Lincoln's head upside down and facing you. If you can see the top of Lincoln's head, you are ready for new tires. Also make sure your tires are filled to manufacturer specifications. Bald or improperly inflated tires are no match for a rainy freeway or soggy leaves on neighborhood streets.

- **Pack plenty of supplies.** Weather-related accidents and road closures can cause lengthy delays, turning your short trip into a tiring adventure. Prior to leaving, make sure your vehicle's emergency kit is stocked and you have plenty of water and snacks for your journey. Using trip-planning software, map out gas stations and convenience stores along the route to ensure that you and your passengers' "tanks" are always full.

For additional information about Microsoft Streets & Trips, please visit www.microsoft.com/streets/travel.