Vehicle Malfunctions

Dashboard Warning Symbols

It is essential to know what the warning lights and gauges on the instrument panel mean and where they are located. Become familiar with a vehicle by reading the owner’s manual. This will help prevent the driver from being caught “off-guard” should a problem arise.

**Warning symbols** – Red color means stop as soon as possible and have the problem repaired. Yellow color means have the problem repaired within a reasonable time.

- **Temperature light or gauge** – warns when the coolant in the engine is too hot or too low. Stop as soon as possible and repair. Caution: never attempt to remove the radiator cap when the engine is hot as there is the risk of severe burns.
- **Oil pressure warning light or gauge** – warns when the oil is not circulating at the proper pressure or there is not enough oil. Repair in a reasonable time.
- **Brake system warning light** – shows the parking brake is set before moving the vehicle and alerts that part or all of the braking system is not working properly or the brake fluid is too low. Stop as soon as possible. Have the vehicle towed and the vehicle repaired.
- **Anti-lock braking system (ABS) light** – indicates whether the ABS is functioning properly. If it comes on while driving there is a problem with the system. Repair in a reasonable time.
- **Air bag warning light** – indicates the air bags are not in proper working condition. Repair in a reasonable time.
- **Check engine light** – monitors operation of fuel, ignition, and emission control systems. This light should come on when the ignition is on, but the engine is not running. If the light does not come on, have the system fixed right away. If the light stays on or it comes on while driving, the computer is indicating there is a problem. Repair in a reasonable time.
- **Door ajar light** – comes on if a door(s) is not closed properly. Check all doors immediately, but do not check while driving.
- **Low fuel warning light** – tells how much fuel remains when the ignition is on. When the low fuel light activates, it means approximately two gallons remain. Get fuel as soon as possible.
- **Alternator/Generator warning light or gauge** – the vehicle’s electrical system is in trouble if this light comes on or the gauge shows “discharge” while the engine is running. Discharge occurs when the alternator is not generating enough electricity to charge the battery. Be aware that if this happens, the engine must use electricity stored in the battery. Turn off as many electrical devices as possible (i.e., the radio, heater/AC, etc.). Caution: Have this checked without delay. If the battery is drained, the car can shut off.
Tire failure can be caused by the gradual wear on the tires through hard braking and/or acceleration. They also need periodic balancing and alignment. Look for wear bars appearing across the tire as a sign that tires need to be replaced.

**A tire blowout** is a rapid deflation of air from the tire. If a front tire blows out, the vehicle will pull sharply in the direction of the blowout. If a rear tire blows out, the vehicle will wobble and shake and pull some in the direction of the blowout. In either case:

1. Grip the steering wheel firmly
2. Remove foot from accelerator
3. DO NOT BRAKE
4. Allow the vehicle to slow on its own or brake gently if necessary
5. Check traffic around you
6. Turn on emergency flashers
7. Drive to a protected location and pull off the roadway
8. Have the tire changed and replaced

**Accelerator failure** could be caused either by a broken spring or the pedal getting stuck in the down position. In either case:

1. Shift to “neutral” (the engine may race but no harm will be done)
2. Search for an escape path
3. Steer smoothly and brake gently
4. Pull off the roadway
5. Turn off the vehicle
6. Have the pedal repaired at a service center before driving again

**Brake failure** could be complete loss of brakes or only failure of the power brakes. If the brakes quit working:

1. Rapidly pump the brakes (may regain brakes)
2. Shift to a lower gear
3. If pumping the brakes doesn’t work, apply the parking brake
4. Release the brake if the wheels lock. Reapply the parking brake if needed.
5. Find a “soft” crash area

If power brakes fail, the car can still be stopped with more pressure on the brake pedal.
Vehicle Failures

**Engine failure** could happen when the engine quits running completely or becomes flooded or overheats. If the engine just shuts off while driving:

1. Shift to neutral
2. Look for an escape path
3. DO NOT BRAKE HARD
4. Pull off the roadway (brake gently but with more pressure on the pedal)
5. Stop, try to restart the engine
6. If unsuccessful, raise hood and turn on emergency flashers

**If the engine becomes flooded, there will usually be a strong odor of gasoline.**

**To start the engine:**

1. Push the accelerator pedal to the floor and hold it there
2. Turn the key for up to five seconds
3. If it does not start, wait several minutes and try again
4. Once started, release the accelerator pedal

**If the engine overheats while driving:**

1. Turn air conditioner off if it is on
2. Turn on the heater to draw heat off the engine
3. If these fail, move to a safe location off the roadway
4. Turn engine off
5. Do not open the radiator cap
6. Seek help

**Power steering failure:**

1. The vehicle can still be steered.
2. It will require much more effort on the driver’s part.