

Routine Auto Service Never More Important

(MS) -- Given the turbulent economic news, consumers are tightening their belts and cutting back on spending. Delaying or ignoring routine automotive service is no exception, but a bad decision, according to the experts at the non-profit National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE).

Car care extends the life of your vehicle and can prevent minor problems from growing into much more expensive issues. Worn brake pads, if ignored, can escalate into more costly rotor repairs. A "check-engine" light may signal something as minor as the need to replace an inexpensive oxygen sensor. But if ignored, costly damage to the catalytic converter can ensue.

Nor should service intervals be ignored. Failure to change out the engine's timing belt according to the owners manual's schedule can result in major engine damage if the belt fails. Must less dramatic are routine things such as scheduled oil changes, replacing dirty filters, or simply paying attention to tire pressure. These seemingly

minor services help you get better gas mileage.

ASE -- the group that tests and certifies automotive technicians -- offers the following tips on locating a good repair shop:

- Start shopping for a repair facility before you need one.

- Ask your friends and associates for recommendations; consult local consumer groups.

- Arrange for transportation so you will not choose a shop based merely on location.

- Look for a well-organized facility, with vehicles in the parking lot equal in value to your own and modern equipment in the service bays.

- The staff should be courteous and willing to answer your questions.

- Look for policies on estimated repair costs, diagnostic fees, guarantees, and methods of payment.

- Look for signs of professionalism such as civic, community or customer service awards.

- Look for evidence of qualified technicians: trade school diplomas, certificates of advanced course work and certification by ASE.

- And look for the blue and white ASE sign.

- For major jobs ask whether the repair facility usually handles your type of repair work.

Visit the ASE Web site at www.ase.com for seasonal car-care tips and information on why motorists should look for repair facilities that employ ASE-certified automotive technicians.

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