

Title:

AAA Urges Drivers to Heed Dashboard Warning Lights

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Summary:

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Keywords:

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Article Body:

Every time you start your car, the dashboard warning lights glow to greet you and fade away after a few seconds. But if they stay on, there may be a major problem that needs to be dealt with right away.

"Motorists need to be aware of the critical 'big three' warning lights," said John Nielsen, director of AAA Automotive. "They include those that monitor engine oil pressure, engine coolant temperature and the vehicle charging system. To reduce the chances of vehicle damage and/or a roadside breakdown, these warning lights require prompt and proper action when they illuminate."

AAA provides the following guidelines on what to do if these lights come on:

* Engine oil pressure: This warning light commonly displays an oil can symbol or the word "OIL." This means that the engine has lost its supply of pressurized lubricating oil and severe engine damage or catastrophic failure can occur within seconds.

If the oil pressure warning light comes on, pull off the road immediately, shut off the engine and have your vehicle towed to a repair facility. Unless you are in an extremely dangerous situation, do not attempt to drive the vehicle.

* Engine coolant temperature: This light commonly displays a thermometer symbol or the logo "TEMP." When the coolant temperature light illuminates, the engine temperature has exceeded the safe maximum. Until the rise in coolant temperature is reversed, the engine will suffer accelerated wear. If the increase in temperature continues, major engine damage or catastrophic failure will result.

If the coolant temperature warning light comes on, quickly assess the situation. Steam or liquid coolant coming from under the hood is a clear indication of overheating or a leak.

Pull off the road at the first safe opportunity and call for assistance. Because boiling coolant can cause severe burns, do not attempt to open the hood in the presence of excessive steam and never remove the radiator cap when the engine is hot.

* Charging system: This light commonly displays a battery symbol or the logo "ALT" or "GEN" and means that the electrical system is no longer being supplied with power by the alternator.

Depending on the electrical demands of your vehicle and the reserve capacity of its battery, you will generally have at least 20 minutes of daylight driving time before voltage drops to the point at which the ignition system will no longer function.

If the charging system warning light comes on, turn off all unnecessary electrical accessories and drive to the nearest repair facility to have the vehicle checked.