



# ***DON'T*** START A FIRE WITH YOUR VEHICLE

Many only think of lightning strikes or un-doused campfires as sources of wildfires; however, vehicles can also start fires. Here are tips to help avoid starting a fire.

Make sure the vehicle is tuned and functioning properly. This will maintain or improve the vehicle's performance, ensure fuel economy, and reduce potential fire mishaps.

Inspect regularly to ensure there is nothing being dragged, such as chains or incorrectly loaded equipment on a trailer. Sparks from dragging metal can light multiple wildfires along roadways. Regularly check tire pressure and tire wear. Change a flat tire as soon as safety permits. Tire rims hitting the road or rocks can produce sparks.

Catalytic converters (CC) on vehicles can start fires. CC reduce emissions by accelerating combustion of pollutants. The exhaust is then sent through a vehicle's exhaust system. The outside metal temperatures of the CC, which is a flat, plate-like surface under a vehicle, can reach 1,000 degrees F under certain conditions, such as running the air conditioner, towing a trailer, or navigating a mountain pass. Fires can then start when flammable materials, such as dry grass and seeds, collect on the exhaust/CC system or if the vehicle is parked where dried vegetation touches this system. To prevent these types of fire:

- After driving through dry vegetation, check the exhaust/CC system for debris buildup that could pose a fire danger. Remember, the exhaust/CC system will be HOT so allow time to cool prior to removing any accumulated dry vegetation.
- Periodically check the vehicle's exhaust prior to driving first thing in the morning, since it will be cool and thereby allowing removal of debris.
- Avoid driving and parking in dry vegetation.
- And, carry a fire extinguisher in the vehicle.

**John Selenske** is a supervisory contracting officer with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. He can be reached at 515-323-2602 or at [john.selenske@ia.usda.gov](mailto:john.selenske@ia.usda.gov).