2010 Winter Vehicle Preparations

And Operational Considerations

As the season’s change signal another approaching winter in Minnesota it is time to prepare our ground vehicles for continuous operations in support of CAP’s core missions. Your attention is invited to the following items to consider.

1. **Engine.** Now is the time to check hoses, belts, battery, battery connections, fluid levels and engine oil weight. Consider changing engine oil to 5W30 to accommodate easier starting and oil delivery throughout the engine as soon after start up as possible. How is the coolant, both age-wise and level? If the coolant has not been changed in the last 3-5 years it is probably time for a coolant flush and change. And how old is the battery? Extreme cold will kill a weak battery after only a few starting attempts. If the battery is old and weak, NOW is the time to get it replaced. NHQ funds battery replacement costs. Check your battery and clean those battery connections. Dirty and/or loose connections will hamper cold weather starting.

2. **Tires.** Tires are literally where the rubber meets the road, and can make or break mission accomplishment. Now is the time to inspect, properly inflate and or replace worn or unsafe tires. Cold weather reduces air pressures over time, so it is vital to maintain a constant vigil on tire pressure throughout the winter months. And do not forget the spare tire and tire changing equipment. A flat tire on a cold road is the wrong time to find out there is no lug wrench in the vehicle.

3. **Exterior Body.** Frequent washing of the vehicle’s goes a long way to increasing the vehicle’s life span and appearance. Unit’s washing vehicles in automated car washes should only use TOUCHLESS WAND washing systems to prevent damage to roof mounted communication antennas. Wash bays with hand-operated wands are very effective at cleaning wheel wells, body and roofs. Whether by automated car wash or wand car wash bays, finish off the exterior cleaning with the wash option to help deter dirt and salt-laden road grime.

4. **Interior Cleanliness.** Maintaining a clean interior is integral to vehicle longevity and appearance. Frequent vacuuming, window cleaning, inspection of the fire extinguisher and first aid kit, and ensuring the operation of all functions such as heater, horn, wipes, etc. is essential at all times. And ensure there are no unsecured items that could present a hazard during emergency stops or turns.
5. **Operator Training and Licensing.** Units should use every opportunity now to get licensed operators in and around the unit vehicle for training. Operators should drive the van and ensure they are well familiar with all controls, tire changing equipment, vehicle operations binder use and the handling characteristics of a vehicle very different from many member’s privately owned vehicles. Training and driver operations can make or break safe winter operations of CAP vehicles.

6. **Auxiliary Equipment.** Ensure all lights, the horn, mirrors and wiper blades are in proper operating condition throughout the coming winter driving season. Wiper blade replacement is a unit responsibility.

7. **Fuel Levels.** To assist in keeping moisture out of the fuel system endeavor to keep the vehicle fuel level as full as possible. Refrain from adding fuel moisture reducing additives unless the owner’s manual specifically allows such.

8. **Cold Weather Emergency Gear.** Though we hope it never happens, are we prepared for breakdowns in the cold? Items such as shovels, sand, blankets, water, emergency supplies, etc. can be a literal lifesaver to CAP members, or citizens in need of assistance. How is your emergency kit? Are there expired items from years gone by that need replacement?

While the above may not be a complete list of winter vehicle operations and maintenance tips, they are a firm starting point in helping to ensure safe and efficient vehicle operations during the fast approaching winter driving season.

Should a unit vehicle need significant repairs, contact Wing logistics for support and possible NHQ repair funding.

Safe vehicle operations and Semper V.

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