What to Do If Your Car Overheats

There are many things that can go wrong when driving, overheating is a big one. Many factors can cause a car to overheat, typically low coolant during warm temperatures, long drives and congested traffic are to blame.

If your car overheats, do not drive more than a quarter mile. Have it towed to avoid further damage to the engine. However, if there is no experienced mechanic or tow truck nearby, follow these simple steps:

- Pull over to a safe location and turn off the engine.
- Do not open the hood until the car has **completely cooled** or the temperature gauge has moved from hot to cool.
- Check the coolant (also called antifreeze) level in the radiator. Look in the owner's manual if you are unsure where the coolant reservoir tank is.
- Make sure the radiator cap is cool before opening it. Slowly twist it off with a towel and beware of any hot steam. If needed, fill coolant to the top of the radiator. Put the radiator cap back on.
- Be sure the upper or lower radiator hose and any of the heater hoses have not been blocked, disconnected or burst.
- Restart the engine.
- Carefully monitor the temperature gauge. If you see it crossing the optimal mark, pull over to a safe location and turn the engine off.

While your best bet is to get help from a mechanic, your safest bet is to be prepared. Store these essential items in you car: Coolant, tool kit, working flashlight, non-perishable foods and water.

Information and recommendations are compiled from sources believed to be reliable. The National Safety Council makes no guarantee as to and assumes no responsibility for the correctness, sufficiency or completeness of such information or recommendations. Other or additional safety measures may be required under particular circumstances.
Last Revised: 08/09