

# FIRES ON THE HIGHWAY

## *What To Do If They Happen*

Vehicle fires require quick, calm action. Your goal is, first, to prevent injuries and, second, to limit the damage to your vehicle and cargo. Your response can minimize the risk and prevent needless losses.

### **First Steps**

Once you realize there's a fire in your vehicle, bring it to a stop. If it can be done safely, stop where you are. Turn off the ignition and turn on the four-way flashers. Quickly identify the location and determine the cause of the fire. Then take appropriate action.

If you encounter a fire that's burning in another vehicle, park clear of danger. Park uphill of the burning vehicle, if you can, to avoid being caught in leaking flammable liquids. Set up your triangles or other emergency warning devices. Then determine what help is needed and take appropriate action.

What you do first depends on the location of the fire. The specific nature or cause of the fire is a second consideration.

### **Cab and Engine Fires**

If the fire is in your cab or engine compartment, call the fire department at once. Use your CB radio or have the first available person call by telephone.

If it's an engine fire, keep the hood down to choke the fire's supply of oxygen. If the vehicle has one, release the internal hood lock to help firefighters.

If it's an electrical fire, and if it's safe to do so, disconnect the battery cables from the terminals.

Know the proper way to use your extinguisher. Read the instructions before the need arises. Use your fire extinguisher as if it were soon going to be empty, because it is. Use just enough to suppress the flames. Once the extinguisher is empty, use sand or dirt to smother the flames. Water should never be used on an oil fire. It can easily produce a pool of fire.

Keep checking the fire area after the fire's apparently out. Fires in vehicles often die-hard and flare again.

### **Tire Fires**

If a tire is hot but not burning--and if you can handle the fire and wheel without getting burned--remove it from your vehicle. If the tire is on fire, call the fire department immediately. Tires burn hot, and the chemistry of the tire materials makes the fire difficult to control.

Use your fire extinguisher to kill the surface flames. Use water to cool the tire and prevent flare-ups. If there's no water, sand or dirt will help subdue and smother the flames.

### **Cargo and Trailer Fires**

You're not likely to discover a fire in your trailer until the cargo's been burning for a while. If you're hauling highly combustible material, keep the cargo doors closed, or you're asking for a trip to the hospital.

Park your vehicle in a safe place. If you can, unhitch the trailer. Call the fire department. Tell them what you're hauling so they can come with the equipment they'll need.

Carefully open the doors, and then unload the cargo until the source of the fire can be found. If firefighters want to put water on the burning cargo before the source is discovered, make sure they know what cargo you are carrying before they proceed.

Spill fires should be attacked from the edges, pushing them back to the leak.

When flammable liquids are leaking and burning uncontrollably, shovel dirt to confine the liquid to a smaller area.

If you're hauling a cargo tank, close the manhole covers to choke the fire. If your cargo unit is refrigerated, you'll want to know in advance what type of refrigerant is used. Some refrigerants are flammable.

### **Avoid Panic**

By remaining calm, you avoid panic. Your fast action can minimize damage to cargo and vehicle while avoiding injury and perhaps saving lives. □

