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Contents:

Emergency lane frequently blocked – yet, we all hope for rapid help

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New for motorists in 2023

The new year will also ring in several new regulatory alterations for motorists. These apply, for instance, to the validity of the test stickers, the exchange of driver's licenses, first-aid equipment, and electric car subsidies. According to DEKRA, the validity of the colors used for the official test stickers is already set to change at the onset of the year.

DEKRA sustainability magazine now online

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Other topics:

Winter holidaying in the mountains: Know how to use snow chains before you set off

Update first-aid equipment: Two respiratory masks are obligatory

High pressure car washing: Only use flat-jet nozzles

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Traffic jam: immediately form an emergency lane

Emergency lane – clear a path for rescue services

“Everybody hopes for rapid help in an emergency”

Anybody failing to help form an emergency lane in a traffic jam has been liable to a hefty fine for about a year now. Apart from the fine of between 200 and 300 euros, offenders can expect two penalty endorsements in their driver's license and a one-month driving ban. Nevertheless, rescue services, fire brigades and police have recently complained that many motorists still fail to observe this regulation.

What puzzles many of those concerned is that “nobody has any advantage from blocking the path of the rescue services. It won't shorten your journey one bit,” says Markus Egelhaaf at DEKRA Accident Research, who himself is an active fireman. “In fact, the opposite is true; hindering rescue and recovery vehicles will generally only lengthen the rescue operation and the process of accident recording and lane clearance. The traffic jam will simply last longer than it needs to,” says the accident expert. People not helping to clear a path are therefore merely adding to the time they themselves spend in the traffic jam.

That said, many a motorist stuck in the jam might well ask themselves – Do I have to form an emergency lane in every traffic jam situation; isn't it sufficient to do so when I see the rescue vehicles in my rear-view mirror. “The problem is that moving vehicles create an unclear situation on the road and this forces the drivers of rescue vehicles to slow down and consequently lose precious time,” explains Egelhaaf. “Even if this means the loss of just a few seconds on each occasion, spread over a journey along a traffic jam tailing back up to several kilometers can add minutes to the route, and those lost minutes may well decide between the life and death of an accident victim.”

Once traffic has come to a complete standstill there is also often not enough space to form a sufficiently wide emergency lane without engaging in elaborate maneuvering. Frequently, hectic maneuvers and exasperated horn sounding of the vehicles ahead and behind are a common result. All this can be avoided if an emergency lane is formed immediately a traffic jam develops. Vehicles on the left-hand lane pull over to the far left; all the other vehicles move as far as possible to the right. Egelhaaf says “we all hope for rapid and professional help in an accident situation. So, what is preventing motorists from driving with foresight and forming an emergency lane to make one's own contribution to this rapid help? Besides, this usually means that the traffic jam clears up quicker as well.”

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Vehicles with pink stickers: mandatory periodic inspection in 2023

Changes for motorists in 2023

Important dates in the new year

The new year also rings in several new regulatory changes for motorists. These apply, for instance, to the validity of the test stickers, the exchange of driver's licenses, first-aid equipment, and electric car subsidies. According to DEKRA, the validity of the colors used for the official test stickers on the rear number plate is already set to change at the onset of the year. Anyone, still driving on a brown sticker, needs to hurry to a test center for a mandatory periodical vehicle inspection. The validity of the brown sticker expires at the end of 2022. In 2023 all vehicles with a pink sticker are due for mandatory vehicle inspection.

The very last month in which the vehicle inspection is due is indicated by the number at the top of the sticker. Those ignoring this deadline can expect the police to stop them and levy a fine. Should the inspection be more than two months overdue, this may entail a more thorough technical vehicle inspection and additional costs.

January 19, 2023 is an important date for driver's license holders born between 1959 and 1964 who are not yet in possession of a credit card size driver's license. The grey or pink driver's licenses must be exchanged for this card format currently valid throughout the EU. In contrast to the old documents, the credit-card size driver's licenses are furnished with a 15-year expiry date.

In 2023, Corona will rear its ugly head once again for motorists. They must have updated their first-aid kit to fulfill the DIN standard 13164:2022 by February 1. This means that two Corona masks must be added to the first-aid equipment. Both medical and FFP2 masks are permitted.

The beginning of 2023 also sees subsidies change for the purchase of an electric car. Whereas plug-in hybrids are no longer eligible to receive subsidies, the state now offers a maximum of 4,500 euros for the purchase of an electric vehicle up to a net price of 40,000 euros. Added to this is a voluntary contribution from the manufacturers who have previously increased the amount by half of the state premium, making a total of 6,750 euros. For vehicles in the price segment between 40,000 euros and 65,000 euros, the state will add an additional 3,000 euros.

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Winter roads: More distance, less speed

Winter vacation in the mountains

Practice using snow chains at home first

The first few months of the year will again attract many a winter sports enthusiast up into the mountains and the relaxation of Corona regulations promises a more laid-back approach to winter fun than in previous years. Even so, a safe trip to the mountains requires a vehicle suitably equipped for the rigors of winter and an adapted driving style.

Grip is not just important for the skiers on the slopes, but for tires on the road, too – especially on slippery winter roads. German law mandates the use of winter tires in wintry conditions such as snow, ice, and slippery frost. They are distinguished by the alpine symbol "mountain with snowflake". DEKRA experts recommend a minimum tread of four millimeters for winter tires to ensure a firm grip. Violation of this stipulation even entails a fine in Austria.

Motorists intending to drive in more mountainous regions should also have appropriate snow chains on board to counter the expected snowfall. A test fit of the chains is best carried out in one's own garage before setting off. Learning by doing is nerve-wracking and an unnecessarily risky business in cold weather and snow flurries. It is important to note that the speed limit for snow chains is 50 km/h.

It is frequently difficult at first glance to notice when roads become dangerous. The typical danger zones include bridges, road crests, underpasses, and forest aisles. These areas can become particularly cold and hence extremely slippery, even if the road surface is otherwise dry and offers good grip. A 'snowflake' sign at the side of the road indicates an increased risk of black ice.

On wet, snowy, or icy roads, it is generally advisable to drive more slowly and maintain a greater distance. DEKRA accident experts warn that even at 50 km/h, the braking distance of a vehicle can easily double on slippery snow and ice in comparison to dry conditions. It is also safer to dip headlights on cloudy days and make sure that not only the windows, but also the sensors of the assistance systems have been cleared of snow.

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First-aid kit: annual check recommended

Update first-aid equipment

Two respiratory masks mandatory

Motorists should augment their first-aid kit with two respiratory masks by the end of January 2023 at the latest. The masks themselves can be surgical or FFP2 masks. This is to comply with the altered DIN standard 13164 that regulates the contents of first-aid kits. As of February 1, missing face masks will consequently lead to a fine. An incomplete first-aid kit had previously brought with it a fine of five euros, ten euros if the entire kit was missing. The idea behind the introduction of the masks is to provide greater protection for all concerned in the event of an accident. The regulation applies to passenger cars, trucks, buses, and quads.

No effects on the mandatory vehicle inspection

However, the new regulation regarding protective masks has not yet any effect on the mandatory periodical vehicle inspection (HU) due to the lack of implementation of the StVZO, explain the DEKRA experts. However, if it is found during the main inspection that the other first aid material is incomplete, this is classified as a minor defect. This is also the case if the materials show defects or if the first aid kit is missing completely. If the materials are outdated, there is a note in the test report.

An annual “freshness” check

The experts point out that a fully equipped first-aid kit provides valuable service in giving first aid to those injured in an accident. In an emergency every individual could profit. The experts recommend checking the materials once a year as part of a “freshness” check for condition, age and completeness and exchange of unusable parts. The use-by date is given on the reverse side. Once the use-by-date has expired there is no way of guaranteeing that bandages and compresses are still sterile. Anybody purchasing a new first-aid kit must ensure that the contents comply with the DIN standard 13164 and that it comes with the two Corona masks required.

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High-pressure car washing: only use flat jet nozzles

Many motorists rely on high-pressure spray lances to clean their pride and joy. There has been a question of whether the tires can be damaged by the water jet produced by high-pressure cleaners, but a study conducted by the technical services organization DEKRA and the cleaning specialist Kärcher has given the all-clear. “A high-pressure cleaner can be employed without problem if used correctly and at a minimum distance of 30 centimeters to the vehicle surface,” reports DEKRA tire expert Christian Koch. He recommends only using flat jet nozzles for cleaning purposes; these spray the water in a broad, fan-like jet. Such jets are supplied with almost all high-pressure cleaners and are also standard in wash centers, garages and fuel stations. “Rotation or point-jet nozzles indented for industrial application or for removing dirt from stone surfaces, however, can easily damage the tires and are unsuitable for washing the vehicle.” DEKRA Info

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