

February 2023/02

www.dekra.com/en/dekra-info

Publisher:
DEKRA e.V.
Corporate Communication
Handwerkstraße 15
70565 Stuttgart
Germany

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Smoke detectors: exchange in good time

DEKRA experts remind readers that smoke detectors will need to be exchanged in many homes throughout Germany in 2023. The reason is that several federal states introduced a mandatory installation of smoke detectors about a decade ago, and after ten years most smoke detectors in use are coming to the end of their service life, if not sooner in fact.

Carefree celebration: 0.3mg/ml already puts your license at risk

DEKRA traffic experts strongly advise anybody aiming to party around the Carnival period to leave the car in the garage, "Don't take any risks with alcohol. Simply use other means of transport or arrange to be picked up," says traffic psychologist Thomas Wagner. Experience has shown that the police target partygoers around the Carnival period.

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Carefree celebration: don't take to the wheel

Partying during the Carnival period

0.3mg/ml already puts your license at risk

DEKRA traffic experts warn readers that anybody intending to party at Carnival time should leave their car at home. "Don't take any risks with alcohol. Choose other means of transport or arrange to be picked up," says traffic psychologist Thomas Wagner. Experience has shown that the police target partygoers around the Carnival period. Anybody found at the wheel of a car with 0.5mg/ml, even if it is a first offence, is looking at a fine of 500 euros, two penalty points in their license and a risk of a driving ban.

The law comes down heavily on drink driving – and for good reason. Just 0.5mg/ml alcohol in the blood is already sufficient to double the risk of accident; 0.8mg/ml quadruples the risk, and 1.1mg/ml along with complete inability to drive increases the risk by a factor of ten. Many are unaware that 0.3mg/ml already constitutes a criminal offence and can cost the driver dearly - three penalty points in the driving license register, revocation of the driving license itself, in addition to a fine or prison sentence. This regulation also applies to cyclists.

Wagner knows all too well that "it is frequently very difficult to restrict oneself to "just the one" in the midst of a euphoric situation such as a lavish Carnival party," "Good intentions are all too often forgotten in the twinkling of an eye." This is why it would be far better to leave the car at home in the first place. And alternatives there and back abound: public transport, taxi service, being picked up by a "designated driver", who has promised to stay "dry" beforehand are just some of the options.

Across the country in 2021 the Federal Motor Transport Authority registered 70,551 criminal offences and 29,112 infringements involving alcohol. The Federal Statistics Office reports that 5.1 per cent of all accidents involving personal injury had alcohol as a cause. According to the office, alcohol-related accidents tend to be more severe. Of the 15,145 recorded accidents involving intoxicants 13,560 road users were slightly injured, 4,776 severely injured and 197 killed.

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Used car: don't buy a pig in a poke

Used cars remain scarce

Don't lower your standards

Looking for a used car? Then you are most likely having a hard time of it at the moment. The war in the Ukraine, fragile delivery chains and a lack of parts have led to a decline in the number of used cars available and thus to a shortfall of used cars on the market. Even so, DEKRA experts warn against false economy or making too many compromises. "It is precisely at times when the prices are high that the quality of the vehicle needs to be right," says used car specialist Ronald Hufnagel. "The risk of being taken in by appearances, the risk of buying a car that may look nice, but is not really worth the money has not decreased – in fact the opposite is the case."

Highly polished paintwork, prettied up interior, fresh underbody protection and other cosmetic niceties can easily blind the potential buyer to overlook technical faults. "Only sign along the dotted line of a purchase agreement after a specialist has given the vehicle a once over," recommends Hufnagel. "Always take somebody you can trust along with you to view the car, somebody who knows where to look. The rule of thumb is two pairs of eyes see more than just one."

If you don't have a specialist in your circle of friends, then turn to professional help. The used car specialists at DEKRA have specifically developed a used car seal of approval that gives the purchaser that necessary peace of mind when buying privately or from a dealer. The inspection incorporates options which span areas such as vehicle mechanics, bodywork and electronics, whereby a system check of the latter is becoming increasingly important these days. Here, the experts check whether the claimed onboard systems are actually present and function according to regulations, or additionally, whether the speedometer reading is plausible. "This can be worth the investment if you consider possible follow-on costs that might entail otherwise," says Hufnagel.

However, the documentation must also be in order. Take a look at the registration certifications that provided information on the length of ownership and number of previous owners. The service manual and garage invoices are also frequently a good source of information on the history and stated mileage of the vehicle. Ask the seller why he is selling the car and ask about any previous damage. Also ask to see the invoices for professional repair and take the time to go on a test drive, as far as possible, on a known stretch of road.

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Lateral wind conditions: lower speed and keep a good grip on the steering wheel

Caution, lateral wind

Full concentration

When spring storms sweep across the country, it is essential to concentrate fully at the wheel of your vehicle. Wind strength and direction can change at a moment's notice and alter the situation on the road," warn DEKRA experts. "Sometimes it takes just one single strong gust of wind to force the vehicle out of its lane and swift counter steering is necessary," says accident expert Thomas Gut. "In such situations it is equally important to take your foot of the gas. If you are travelling slowly, you have more time to react and can de-escalate dangerous situations more easily."

Particularly dangerous are bridges, forest aisles and tunnel entrances. Here, motorists are often surprised by sudden gusts of wind. This is why warning signs or wind socks are positioned at many exposed areas. "Not to be underestimated are the risks of a side wind when overtaking trucks or buses. Here, drivers must begin by correcting their steering when entering the slipstream of the vehicle in front and then bracing against the wind again after the overtaking maneuver," Gut explains.

If the storm becomes too strong, it can be advisable to hold off overtaking until the wind has dropped. In some circumstances the overtaken vehicle can suddenly be forced off its path by a strong gust. Especial caution needs to be exercised by drivers of vans, mobile homes and caravans or with roof boxes. The large lateral angle of attack is not to be underestimated and the driver must expect correspondingly high wind forces that, in the worst-case scenario, can overturn a vehicle.

"The most important rules for driving in stormy weather are: reduce speed, keep both hands firmly on the steering wheel and, if necessary, desist from overtaking maneuvers," recommends the accident expert. "Look out for warning signs and wind socks, for example, on highway bridges. At high wind speeds it is often better to interrupt your journey and seek out a sheltered spot until the situation has settled itself. "Avoid wooded areas, however, as you may encounter falling branches and uprooted trees.

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Smoke detectors: Exchange in good time

Many smoke detectors up for replacement in 2023

Update for the peeping life savers

DEKRA experts remind readers that smoke detectors will need to be replaced in many homes throughout Germany in 2023. The reason is that several federal states introduced a mandatory installation of smoke detectors about a decade ago and after ten years most of the smoke detectors in use would be coming to the end of their service life. If not earlier in fact, because the electronics in the devices are no longer able to detect smoke arising from a rapidly spreading fire in a reliable manner. This also holds true for devices with replaceable batteries.

“Smoke detection is something that concerns everybody,” says DEKRA fire expert Lars Inderthal. “In a fire most people do not die because of the fire, but due to smoke poisoning. During sleep, there is a reduced ability to notice smoke or fire. As a result, there is an increased risk of being suffocated by smoke in your sleep.” In Germany, every year more than 300 people are killed in house fires. Two out of three are caught in their sleep.

Those homes mainly affected are in Rhineland-Palatinate, Baden-Württemberg, and Hesse. The transition period for the installation of smoke detectors in the years 2012 and 2014 has expired in these regions. The owners are responsible for replacing smoke detectors once they have expired in all the regions mentioned. “We recommend that owners of their own homes as well as of rental property carry out replacements in good time,” says DEKRA fire expert Lars Inderthal. “The technology contained in the devices has moved on in the past ten years,” explains Inderthal. “Latest generation devices bearing the “Q label” are virtually immune to false alarms and self-detect technical faults. The permanently installed batteries can function reliably for up to ten years.”

Those rooms requiring the installation of smoke detectors are laid down in the building regulations of the respective regions. As a minimum, smoke detectors should be installed in bedrooms, guest rooms, children’s rooms, and hallways as well as in rooms that serve as an emergency exit to leave the home. In Berlin and Brandenburg a warning device is also prescribed for living rooms and in other recreation rooms; in other regions, this is merely recommended.

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New on the DVR Board: DEKRA Technical Director Jann Fehlauer

Jann Fehlauer, Managing Director of DEKRA Automobil GmbH, has joined the board of the German Road Safety Council (DVR). “I greatly appreciate the trust bestowed on me,” says the 57-year-old following his election by the DVR Members’ Meeting. “DEKRA has been committed to road safety for almost a century – and has also actively cooperated with the DVR at various levels. I’m delighted that I will now be able to input DEKRA expertise regarding road safety matters at the management level, too.” Jann Fehlauer has been Managing Director of DEKRA Automobil GmbH since 2018. He is responsible for the areas of services/technology. He is also Chairman of the Regional Advisory Group Europe at the International Motor Vehicle Inspection Committee (CITA). Furthermore, he is also member of the board at DEKRA e.V. Dresden, where he is deputy chairman of the members meeting at arge tp 21.

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Too little safety distance: third most common cause of accident

Time constraints make it tempting to edge that much closer to the vehicle in front, even if it doesn’t make the slightest difference to the journey time. Oddly enough, this action can have the opposite effect. In 2021, driving too close to the vehicle in front was responsible for more than 38,000 accidents on the road. After turning off errors, turning, reversing and non-observance of rights of way, the lack of maintaining adequate distance is the third most common cause of an accident, and especially so in the urban environment. “If visibility is unhindered, the rule of thumb for correct distancing is half the speedometer in meters,” explains DEKRA’s accident expert Stephan Schlosser. So, if you are travelling at 60km/h you require around 30 meters distance to the vehicle in front. In poor visibility and on slippery roads the road traffic regulations stipulate a correspondingly greater safety cushion. In fog, rain or in poor light it is even recommended to lengthen the distance to match the speedometer reading. Schlosser points out that “every meter means more safety.”

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