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Spring is a time when many children get back on their bikes. This also means that grownup road users need to keep their eyes open and show consideration. “Anybody who sees children on the road should be aware that they are still learning how to negotiate road traffic correctly,” says DEKRA accident researcher Luigi Ancona.

Dangers when reversing: dangerous blind spots

Reversing is not the easiest of driving maneuvers. Ever smaller rear windows, chunkier door posts, poor visibility or problems turning round can make it difficult for motorists to see what is happening behind the vehicle.

Hailstone damage – what now?

The summer months and climatic change have combined to make hail a more regular occurrence. According to the German insurance industry, damage of around 1.3 billion euros was caused to cars in 2021 just from hail, lightning, and stormy conditions alone. DEKRA experts tell readers what those who suffer hailstone damage need to pay attention to.

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Unerring: The dent reflector can reveal the slightest hailstone damage

Hailstone damage – what now?

First approval, then repair

Summer months and climatic change have combined to make hail a more regular occurrence. According to the German insurance industry, damage of around 1.3 billion euros was caused to cars in 2021 just from hail, lightning, and stormy conditions alone. DEKRA experts tell readers what those who suffer hailstone damage need to pay attention to.

- **Inform your insurance.** Hailstone victims must inform their insurance “immediately” about the incident, either in writing, by phone or email. And be as detailed as possible, giving the day, time and location. Those with partial or full insurance coverage are insured in full against hailstone damage.
- **Take photos.** It can be sensible to take photographic evidence directly after the hailstone damage so as to document the extent of the problem.
- **Minimize damage.** Affected parties are obliged to minimize damage. For example, cover broken windshields to protect the vehicle from rain.
- **Obtain approval.** Do not have any repairs undertaken until the insurance has given its approval. If damage is repaired before obtaining confirmation of cover, the motorists may end up footing the bill themselves.
- **Inspection.** Usually, the insurance company will arrange a date for inspection by the appraiser, for example, from DEKRA, who will determine the extent of damage and stipulate the repair solution.
- **Repair or cash.** The motorist affected can choose between repair of the vehicle or cash settlement of the claim. If repair is chosen, it is important to find out if the insurance agreement stipulates a specific garage.
- **Disclosure.** When selling the vehicle, the seller must inform the buyer of the hailstone damage otherwise the buyer may, in certain circumstances, be entitled to withdraw from the sales contract.

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Dangerous grey zones: Look behind you!

Warning, motorists!

Dangerous blind spots

Reversing is not the easiest of driving maneuvers. Smaller and smaller rear windows, chunkier door posts, poor visibility or problems turning round can make it difficult for motorists to be aware of what's happening behind the vehicle. Even though the rear-view mirror is augmented on modern vehicles by electronic systems such as parking sensors issuing acoustic warning signals or reversing cameras, the act of reversing is still a dangerous operation.

"The situation behind the vehicle can change in the twinkling of an eye. For example, if a pedestrian suddenly approaches from the side, even a fast-reacting system cannot shorten the driver's reaction time," explains DEKRA accident analyst Thomas Gut. "This is why it is not simply sufficient to cast a glance at the reversing camera display before reversing or to blindly rely on the parking sensor."

"Keep a good eye on the surroundings of your vehicle and make sure, among other things, by looking over your shoulder, best of all twice, that you can reverse without endangering others," recommends the accident expert. People who feel unsafe are required by the road traffic regulations to have themselves directed by a third party. This applies especially if the visibility conditions require it, or if the vehicle has a "blind spot".

"I would recommend looking around you before you get into the vehicle and scan the immediate vicinity for any danger. Also check to see if there is a traffic mirror that can give you an overview of the road situation," says the expert. For instance, people frequently move behind vehicles in car parks, and nearby schools, nursery schools or sports fields signal the possibility of children, who, on account of their size, are easily overlooked.

Parking backwards can be helpful, but this is usually not desired in underground garages. In outdoor parking lots, it can sometimes help to keep the overview. An important rule is also: "Never drive with momentum in reverse, but always feel carefully and gently backwards." One solution is to reverse into the parking slot, although in underground car parks this is often not desired. However, in outside parking lots it helps to retain an overview. One important rule is also never to reverse at speed, but always to work your way backwards carefully and slowly."

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Swings and climbing frames: look out for shock-absorbing surface coverings

DEKRA tips

Playground safety

Children's playgrounds come in all shapes and sizes. Most of them are in a good condition, but there are also the shameful exceptions. DEKRA experts give some tips on what to look out for in children's playgrounds:

- Pay attention to the overall condition of the equipment. This should give some indication of the general safety level of the playground.
- Are there sufficient shock-absorbing surfaces around playground equipment that children can fall from and which would lessen the consequences of a fall, e.g., grass, sand, fine gravel, bark mulch, wood chippings, synthetic material?
- Never wear a bicycle helmet while using playground equipment. Since the devices are not designed for use with a helmet, children can get stuck in gaps in the equipment. Even loose scarves and cords on clothing can get caught in the equipment.
- Does the playground equipment display damage or missing parts, which could cause injury to children? Are there any protruding parts that might cause injury?
- Wood is a living material. Depending on the quality, material and exterior influences, the wooden components can suffer from rotting. Can you notice any weathered or rotten components? The presence of fungal growth is generally a clear sign that renewal is required.
- If the playground is opposite neighboring sources of risk (i.e. adjacent roads, deep ditches, and bodies of water), is sufficient protection from them provided? The playground must be designed so that children know they are leaving the playing area, such as through fencing, a gap or landscaping.
- The smaller the children, the more they have to be supervised and instructed on playground equipment. For children under three years of age, there is a statutory duty of supervision, which must also be guaranteed on playgrounds.
- The younger the children, the more they need to be supervised and directed when playing on playground equipment. Children under the age of three are subject to a mandatory duty of supervision that must also be ensured in playgrounds.

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Cycling to school: Do not overestimate bicycle training

Children on bikes

Practice makes perfect

Spring is a time when many children get back on their bikes. This means that grownup road users need to keep their eyes open and be considerate. “Anybody who sees children on the road should be aware that children are still learning how to behave in road traffic correctly.” Many children also need to gradually become acquainted with and internalize all the many rules and regulations says DEKRA accident researcher Luigi Ancona.

Children can gain their first experiences of riding a bicycle on the road early on. As far as the parents can trust them, children up to the age of eight can ride on sidewalks and cycle paths, but not use the cycle lanes on the road. Children under the age of eight are required to be in the company of somebody over the age of 16 when cycling on a sidewalk.

Between the ages of eight and ten children are permitted to use the sidewalk, the cycle path or the road. From the age of ten, children are obliged to cycle on the road or the cycle path. To ease children into this practice, the school curriculum of elementary schools provides for bicycle training in the third or fourth classes.

“Bicycle training is a good way of introducing the children to the most important road safety rules and regulations. However, it should not be overestimated, especially as the course is a relatively short one and takes place in a safe area. It is also frequently not possible to transfer what is learnt to the real road situation later,” reminds Ancona. “It is up to the parents to assess when they can trust their child to cycle independently to school, to sports clubs or to friends.”

To ensure a safe ride, the accident researcher recommends those new to cycling to practice a specific school route, wear a cycle helmet and to establish visual contact with other road users when they come across them. Heightened caution is particularly called for when entering moving traffic and when setting off from the side of the road. Paragraph 3 of the Road Traffic Regulations demands of motorists to avoid endangering children by driving particularly slowly and that they must be prepared to brake at any time.

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DEKRA launches world first: cyber security seal of approval for charging stations

DEKRA safety experts point out that a cyber attack on the charging infrastructure for electric cars can have serious impact. The consequences range from a – possible large-scale – power cut to dangerously high current surges and extend to misuse of personal and payment information. If an attacker manages to access a charging station, he can, in certain circumstances, paralyze the entire charging network. Even though the corresponding statutory regulations are still being thrashed out, DEKRA has already prepared itself for the problem. The company is the first to offer a special cyber security test seal of approval for charging stations of electric vehicles. “It means that manufacturers of charging units are better able to protect their products from the ever-present threats posed by cyber criminals,” says the head of strategic development for product testing at DEKRA, Vincent Roes.

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Springtime: summer windshield cleaner necessary

In the spring, it is advisable to fill the windshield cleaning system with a dedicated summer windshield cleaner otherwise unsightly streaks can build up on the windshield. Winter windshield cleaners contain alcohol to protect against frost. On account of the composition, winter windshield cleaners are frequently not ideal at tackling specific summer problems such as fine particulate, insects, bird droppings or wood resin. And this, over time, impairs visibility for the motorist. Especially unfavorable light conditions such as a low-lying sun, rain or darkness can cause dazzling, say the DEKRA experts. When buying a windshield cleaner look out for a test seal. This provides a reliable indication of the quality of the product. Cleaners thus marked have been tested in laboratory tests for their cleaning performance, ingredients, material compatibility and safety-relevant properties.

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