

RV Maintenance Tips

Maintaining your RV is easy and in your best interest. Maintenance should be performed on your RV system components on a regular basis. Keep records of maintenance performed so that you know what you did and when. Good maintenance records will also be valuable when selling the RV.

Here are some key components that you should check on a regular basis:

Tires – *know the proper tire pressure for your RV and maintain that pressure. Recommended tire pressures are usually listed on a sticker inside the RV near the driver seat on a wall or side panel. Check tire pressure at least once a month or before a scheduled trip. Check for weather cracks in the tires. Look carefully around the tire near the wheel rim for cracks. Tread depth is not a good indicator of tire condition. Many RV tires with good tread depth fail because proper tire pressure is not maintained or due to age or weather rot. A good rule of thumb is to replace the tires if they are more than five or six years old, especially if the RV is stored outside. The rubber compound of the tires provides lubrication to keep them pliable when rotating. It is important to drive the RV to get tire temperatures up to normal operating temperatures on a regular basis. This will help to keep the tires from getting “dry rot” and cracks because the operating temperature and flexing action activates molecules in the rubber compound to keep them flexible.*

Drive train – *know the recommended service interval for your vehicle and change oil and filter as listed by the manufacturer. Drive trains will last many miles, if properly maintained. One of the key areas to watch is the inner rear wheel seal near the wheel and brake drum. When the seals begin to fail, you will see oil on the wheel and inside of the rear tire. When this is present, the seal and brake components need to be serviced immediately. Oil leaking onto the brake pads will reduce braking ability and may result in a fire hazard. If you catch this early enough, you may avoid having to replace the brake pads.*

Batteries – *the key to long battery life is making sure that the connections are clean and the liquid level in the battery is properly maintained. Check batteries once a month. Cracks or bulging of the battery case will be a good indicator that it is time to replace the battery. Keep the battery charged if the RV is stored for a long period of time. One good way to prolong the life of your batteries is to disconnect the batteries when the RV is not in use for long periods of time. This removes any small electrical drains on the battery. Be sure to fill the battery with distilled water. Do not use tap water because the chemicals in tap or well water will shorten the life of the battery. Some RV battery disconnect switches do not completely stop current flow. To check current flow, use a volt meter to check the current flow between the disconnected battery cable and battery terminal. A small battery maintainer is also very useful in keeping the battery charged. The maintainer can be purchased for about \$10. It will not charge a battery, but it will keep a charged battery maintained at the charge level to start the RV after long periods of being idle.*

Holding Tanks – Gray and Black water tanks should be drained after each trip. Baking Soda is a good cleaning agent for the holding tanks. After draining the tanks, add several gallons of water to each tank and add one pound of soda to each tank. The soda will break up waste particles in the tank and will also help to clean tank sensors. When in use, do not leave the tank drains in the open position. If the tank drain is left open, no liquid will be in the tank to help dissolve solid waste. The solid waste will build up inside the tank and will be more difficult to remove. Empty tanks at the end of your trip or when more than half full. The additional liquid provides better tank draining, especially for the black water tank where tissues and solids must be flushed from the tank. The additional liquid provides a better flushing action. Drain the Black Water Tank first then close the release valve. Drain the Gray Water Tank to flush any residual black water from the drain hose. Flush the drain hose with fresh water to remove remaining gray and black water from the hose. Do NOT add Baking Soda and Bleach to the same tank as this could result in poison gases being released into the RV.

Fresh Water Tank – Water should be drained from the fresh water tank at least once a month. The tank should be shocked with a bleach solution at least every six months to kill bacteria growth. This may be more frequent if you live in a warm climate and water is left in the tank for prolonged periods. Go to the RVSurvey website to find a detailed description of the “fresh water shock” process.

Hot Water Heater – This tank should be drained at least once every six months. The hot water tank can be drained by removing the electrode rod (if the heater is electric) or drain plug from the tank. This is a good time to check the condition of the electrode. If the rod is heavily corroded, replace it. This rod acts like a magnet for electrolysis build up in the tank. A clean rod will help keep the tank clean and operating more efficiently. Check the pressure release valve for leaks. If you see signs of water, rust or oxidation around or near the base of the water heater tank, look first at the pressure release valve for corrosion. You can get a replacement pressure relief valve at your local hardware or plumbing store by taking the old one with you and getting an exact replacement. Plastic drain plugs often crack, begin to leak and need to be replaced. Obtain a replacement plug and carry as a spare.

Refrigerator – If the refrigerator will not be used for a while, turn the unit off and open the doors to prevent mildew and mold. If the refrigerator is left on, gas operation provides more heat to reduce moisture build up and reduce rusting of the cooling tubes. In either case, gas or electric, leaving the refrigerator on, if possible, keeps the ammonia solution, used in the cooling system, flowing and prevents the ammonia and water from separating. This also helps prevent the tubes from rusting from the inside out due to moisture. If you leave the unit on gas, make sure the RV is stored in a place safe for gas operation. If you elect NOT to leave the refrigerator on for long periods of time, operate it periodically to keep the cooling solution suspended.

Awnings – After use, make sure the awnings are stored dry. If you are not able to store the unit dry, return to it as soon as possible and open the awnings to dry. Mildew and rot will destroy the awnings. Look for tears in the awning material along the outside seams and at the attach point near the roof mounting point. When using your awning, make sure that each end of the awning is tied to the ground with stakes or a coiled rod that can be screwed into the ground. If you do not have awnings with a metal cover over the awning material and your RV is stored outside, you may want to put some type of cover

over the awning to protect the awning material. RV enthusiasts have created many different devices to protect the awning from plastic pipe covers to material held in place with sections of plastic pipe cut to hold the material in place. Whatever you can do to protect the awning while stored outside will be in your best interest in the long run.

Generator – The generator oil and filter should be changed at recommended intervals. A good rule of thumb is around 150 hours of use. Be sure to check the condition of the drive belt at the cooling shroud. The belts are sometimes hard to see and may require removal of the shroud to check the condition of the belt. It is recommended that the generator be run once a month for 30 minutes with a constant load to keep the generator lubricated and at the same time remove moisture from the generating unit. A good practice is to start the generator then turn both air conditioners on to put a load on the generator. Just running the generator without a load is not nearly as valuable as loading the generator during operation.

Roof Air Conditioner – Check the air conditioner shroud for cracks. Repair when any signs of cracking appear. The roof air conditioner is exposed to intense sun and the shroud will deteriorate over time. It is also exposed to low hanging limbs that may cause damage that needs to be repaired. Replacements are available but they are not cheap. Repairs can often be made with fiberglass cloth and liquid fiberglass resin and hardener. Some air conditioner fan motors require lubrication and others have permanently sealed bearings. Check your unit by removing the shroud on the roof and looking at the shaft coming out of the fan motor. If you have a small plastic cap or open tube coming up from the fan shaft at the motor, they will require oil at least once a year. This is an overlooked item on most RVer's maintenance list and can result in the fan motor freezing up or burning up. A costly repair can be avoided by making sure that the shaft is lubricated. Check the air intake filter and clean or replace as required. It is also a good practice to blow air through the condenser behind the fan blade to remove dirt, dust and debris from the condenser coils. This will improve cooling efficiency.

Furnace – Install bug screens to keep unwanted visitors out of your gas furnace system. Insects can build nests inside the heating tube that can restrict air flow.

Engine – Several things to check that will help you keep your RV in running order:

Oil – check engine oil level. Check to see when you last changed your oil and filter. We recommend changing oil every six months, regardless of miles driven. Be sure that the engine is run at least once a month until normal operating temperature is reached. Bringing the engine to operating temperature will also remove moisture present on the engine components. This will keep critical engine components lubricated and fuel system cleaner. Look for leaks under the RV before moving it to better isolate where the problem may be located. Note relative area of the leak so that appropriate repairs can be made before that next long trip. Leaking fluids may result in fire or operating failure of critical components.

Coolant – Check coolant levels in the overflow reservoir. Add combination coolant and water (50/50 mixture) as needed. Be sure to check coolant freeze point before winter weather to make sure that appropriate protection is provided. If the coolant is discolored and rusty, flush system and fill with new coolant.

Diesel engines have coolant filters with different chemical compounds in them based on the PH level of the coolant. Simple test strips are available to assist you in determining which filter should be used.

Fuel – *Add fuel conditioner if the RV will be stored for longer than one month at a time. Gasoline additives to stabilize the fuel should be used. If in doubt about the amount of time the RV will be stored before the next trip, add a stabilizer to the tank when filled after your trip. Diesel additives to prevent moisture and fungus should be used to prevent potential problems.*

Drive Belts – *check drive belts for cracking and wear. If you decide not to replace belts, obtain spares to carry in the RV for emergency replacement.*

Stabilizers / Jacks – *Lubricate worm gears and base plates to keep them operating smoothly. Use a silicone, spray grease, or lithium spray on the gears and base plate hinge. If you have hydraulic stabilizers, check the fluid level in the hydraulic reservoir. If you hear your warning alarm sounding when the jacks are in the upright position or the alarm sounds when turning a corner or going over a bump, you may be low on fluid. Refer to your user manual for the proper procedure for filling the fluid reservoir. Make sure your base plates move freely. One method that works for most systems is to lower one jack about 8-10 inches. Leave the system on with the alarm sounding. Fill the fluid reservoir until the alarm stops. Replace the fill cap and raise the jack.*

Alarms – *Check smoke alarm and carbon dioxide alarms to make sure they are operating. Push the test button and if it doesn't operate, replace the battery. Check the propane gas detector each time you test the alarms.*

Air Dryer/Filter – *RVs with air brakes and air bags have a dryer/filter mounted behind the rear axle on the frame. The dryer/filter has a heating coil that works with the filter and desiccant to dry the air for the brake system. The filter helps to keep contaminants out of the brake system. These units are often overlooked during routine maintenance. The recommended maintenance interval is 2-3 years. If you don't know when or if your filter and desiccant has been changed and the coach is older than three years, change the filter and desiccant.*