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## How To Prep Your RV For Spring

By Dave Helgeson - Adventures in RVing

Spring has sprung and that means it's time to take the RV out of hibernation. Before heading out on your first RV trip of the year, spend an afternoon going through your unit to make sure everything is in proper working order.

If you took the proper steps in winterizing your RV, it should be ready to go with minimal preparation.

Below is a handy checklist to get your RV ready for a spring camp-out:

### Exterior

- Check the tires for proper air pressure and cracks in the sidewalls. Don't forget the spare.
- Check the unit for any damage. (Tree limbs that fell over the winter, rodents that may have entered the RV, etc.)
- Remove any protecting covers, outside and inside.
- Check the outside components. (Cracked side vents, missing light covers, baggage door operation, turn signals, etc.)
- Check to make sure your license plate tabs are current.

### Interior

- Open windows and roof vents to air it out and make sure all the windows and vents are in working order.
- Give the inside a thorough cleaning and check for unwanted visitors, such as bugs, mice, etc.
- Vacuum carpets, inside the cabinets, under the dinette seats and sleeping areas.
- Make sure you have an up-to-date and fully supplied first aid kit. Double check expiration dates.
- Check towels and linens that may have been removed for the winter. (Bedding, blankets, pillows, washcloths, beach towels, etc.)
- Click [here](#) to make sure your fire extinguisher is not part of the nationwide recall of Kiddie brand extinguishers. Obtain a replacement if necessary.

### Operating systems

- De-winterize the unit and flush the freshwater system.

- Check the freshwater system for proper operation. Don't forget to check both the water pump and city water hook-up. Test all valves including faucets, outside shower, and toilet.
- Flush and fill the freshwater tank. (Fill it completely full at least once a year to check for leaks in the upper part of the tank, fill hose and vent tube.)
- Make sure the carbon monoxide detector, smoke alarm, LP detector, and fire extinguishers are all in working order. Install fresh batteries for those that aren't tied into the RV's electrical system.
- Check the battery. Make sure the water level is correct, it is fully charged, and terminals are tight.
- Check the water heater on gas and electric if so equipped. Make sure the gas burner tube is clean and nothing has nested in it during the winter. If equipped with bypass valves, be sure they are returned to the "summer" position. Note: Never operate the water heater on electric unless the tank is full of water.
- Take the propane tank(s) to be filled. Many states require the tanks be recertified after a set period of time. If your state is one of them, ask the filling attendant how much longer you have until your tanks are due for recertification and act accordingly.
- Check all appliances for proper operation. Wipe out the refrigerator and check operation on both gas and electric.
- Check and clean the air conditioning filter.

Finally, make sure your public land passes are current: US forest service pass, trail passes, state trust lands, etc.

Avoid an unpleasant adventure in RVing by making sure your RV is ready before your first camp-out of the spring. Drive safe and enjoy!

## Spring RV Safety Checks

*By Walter Cannon*

Well it's that time of year again RVers! Spring has sprung! The time of year when we, who have hibernated over the course of a long winter, stick our heads outside and are bitten once again by the camping bug. But before we get out there and go RVing there are a few things we need to do to make sure we have a safe and fun time in our recreational vehicles.

Several RVers in those cold portions of the country have winterized their units and need to de-winterize them now. First, we need to remove any covers placed on our unit, be it placing cardboard over the refrigerator, water heater or furnace compartment openings or full coach covers over our units.

But let's start with the electrical system. If you removed the batteries, reinstall them and make sure they are fully charged and the terminals are clean. Check the water level (flooded batteries) and test each battery with a hydrometer. For sealed top batteries, you'll have to rely on voltage measurements to determine the state of charge. Moving to the 120-volt AC system, inspect the power cord and plug for fraying and cracks. Should you find any damage to the cord or plug, replace them immediately. Also be sure to check any extension cords you may use and make sure they are rated for the proper amperage. Check the GFCI for proper operation as well as all the receptacles. Should you find a problem, either replace them or have them replaced by a certified RV service technician.

The propane system needs to be visually inspected as well. Check all rubber connectors for any damage that might have occurred from rodents. Look for kinked copper tubing at each appliance. Clean the exterior and interior vents of the furnace. On the water heater, be sure to clean the burner area with air or vacuum away any debris. Flush the inner tank and return the water heater to normal operational settings. Be sure it is filled with water before igniting the burner or activating the electrical heating element. Check all the vents, exterior and interior, of all the appliances to make sure they are free of debris and spider webs. Don't forget the refrigerator vent mounted on the roof. Be sure to have all the appliances serviced and in good working order. Now, at the start of the season is when I have a timed pressure drop test performed by a qualified technician on my propane system. It is recommended to have this test done at least once a year and what better time than just prior to the start of the season? Be sure to change the dry cell batteries in the propane and carbon monoxide detectors as well as in the smoke alarm.

Don't forget to sanitize and flush the fresh water system, including all hoses and filters. You will also want to check the tanks, valves and hose of your waste water system to make sure there are no leaks.

Let's now move to the tires and chassis. Inspect both sides of all tires, checking for cracking and discoloration. Check for weather checking on each tire and valve stem. Check the tread depth and the air pressure. Remember to set the air pressure based on the heaviest load on a tire across the axle. Also be sure to check and torque the lug nuts prior to the first excursion.

Check the brakes and inspect all wiring connections under the unit. Look for hanging wires that may need to be strapped up out of the way. If you have a travel trailer or 5<sup>th</sup> wheel, this would also be a good time to repack the bearings and check the brake controller for proper adjustment and operation. If you have air brakes, be sure to perform the three important tests of the air brake system.

- 1) Air Leak Test
- 2) Emergency & Recovery System Test
- 3) Parking & Service Brake Test

By the way, these three tests should also be performed at the start of each driving day. Some municipalities may even request you perform these tests on the spot.

Check and change out the windshield wipers. They take a lot of abuse from the varying weather patterns. Check the headlights, backup lights, running lights and brake lights. Replace any broken lenses and burned out bulbs. Check all fuses and be sure to have extras of each size on hand. The same for spare bulbs or LEDs.

Proper preparation prior to the start of the RVing season will get you on your way quicker and safer. However, you must still be diligent as you travel throughout the season. Never compromise the safety factor!

*Walter Cannon is the Executive Director of the RV Safety & Education Foundation, headquartered in Merritt Island, FL.*

## The Smartest Way to Avoid RV Wrecks and Disasters

By Rene Agredano - The Full Timing Nomad

Anyone with the cash can buy a recreational vehicle. Most can be driven on the street without any additional training. But if the owner hasn't mastered the art of avoiding RV wrecks and disasters, all bets are off. Two RV driver education experts in the field explain why the cost of a weekend RV driving school will save you far less money and heartache than repairing a wrecked rig.

### **RV Driving without a G.O.A.L**

Lots of us think we are good RV drivers, but even the most experienced RVer can stand to learn new techniques to lower their accident risk. My husband and I learned this lesson three years after we became full-time RVers.

We drove into the Utah Forest Service campground and found that perfect every RVer dreams about. It was so peaceful and scenic that we weren't ready to leave on check-out day, so we extended our stay. But our holding tanks needed emptying and our water supply replenished, so we packed up and went to town. A couple hours later we returned to the same spot.

As always, I got out of the truck to guide my husband into the back-in site. But our rig was at an odd angle, which made the parking job a tedious chore. The large boulder on our truck's right rear passenger side didn't make things easier as he maneuvered back and forth to squeeze past the obstruction.

When I saw that he was getting too close and yelled to warn him, the throaty roar of our Dodge was louder than my screech. And before I could flail my arms to say "STOP!" the sickening

crunch of metal on granite filled the air.

### **The Art of Avoiding RV Wrecks and Disasters**

Was the accident preventable? Absolutely, according to Gary Lewis, founder of RV Basic Training. Lewis says we failed to follow a common sense parking strategy followed by commercial truckers everywhere. It's known as the "G.O.A.L." –

**Get  
Out  
And  
Look!**

We neglected to walk around that spot to gauge the distance of the rock to our truck. Had we done so, our truck would still look brand new.

"How much simpler can you get?" says Lewis. "If every RV driver drove like a commercial driver you won't get there with a problem."

Ten years ago Lewis launched his school to help RVers avoid RV wrecks and disasters like ours. Since then, the enthusiastic instructor says he's seen every kind of RV wreck under the sun. Usually people call him after an accident has happened, eager to get their confidence back and continue RVing.

Lewis and his cadre of 12 instructors (and growing) teach drivers all the basics of good RV driving skills, including:

- Straight line backing
- Offset backing
- Parallel parking
- Backside backing

Through his hands-on training and RV Basic Training manual, Lewis gets students into the habit of thinking like commercial truckers whenever they're behind the wheel. "You never move it without doing a safety check," he says. "Do a walk around. Check underneath, look at the tires. Go clockwise and then counter clockwise to make sure you're all clear. Are the doors secured? Any funny smells? Is everything put away? All commercial drivers do this."

### **Objects are Always Closer Than They Appear**

Most RV wrecks happen like ours did – a driver hits an object that is closer than it appears. George Mayleben, owner of RV Driving School, says other common RV wrecks often seen on the road include:

- hitting filling station islands
- colliding with low bridges
- miscalculating stopping distances

The list grows longer with other accident factors, like over-inflated tires and overloaded RV cargo, he says.

"The RVs are big!" explains Mayleben. "They require an understanding of how to keep the vehicle under control."

Despite the large ticket price to buy RVs, most RVers take the "It won't happen to me" approach when getting behind the wheel. Young RVers and elder retired seniors alike typically don't think RV wrecks and disasters are other people's problem. They usually don't seek RV driver education training until something bad happens.

"We see a variety of reasons why folks come to us for help. Sometimes it is the realization that the RV is more of a challenge than originally anticipated." Mayleben says. His students are mostly comprised of drivers over 55. And although younger people are buying RVs each year, most don't feel they need the training.

Women are a fast growing demographic in RV driving schools like Maylben's. More are learning how to drive RVs, and instructors agree that the investment is especially valuable for

them. If a woman is traveling with a partner who does the majority of the driving, knowing how to drive their RV can make life much easier if an unexpected health problem happens to the main driver. "We train an awful lot of women who have been put in that position because of a health issue with the husband," says Lewis.

### **Give RVs the Respect they Deserve.**

In any good RV driving school, students have the choice to learn RV driving tips in a classroom setting as well as one-on-one lessons with professionally trained instructors. The road lessons can be provided in a RV owned by the student, or in some instances, rentals are provided by the school itself. New driver lessons are offered as well as refresher courses for more experienced RVers. Some training sessions are just one day while others are multi-day. With so many education options, avoiding RV wrecks and disasters is totally possible.

"You cannot drive a bus the same way you drive a car," warns Lewis. "If you don't give it the respect it deserves and making sure you're all clear, you're going to have a problem. It's that simple."

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## **How to Pack a Travel Trailer**

Shelley Frost, Leaf Group

A camping trip with a travel trailer allows you to bring along some of the comforts of home while trekking to remote areas to experience nature. Before you take off on the camping trip, you need to pack the camper with the essentials and some extras that will make your travels safe and comfortable. In addition to knowing what to pack, strategic item placement is essential for a smooth trip without damage to your belongings or the inside of the travel trailer. Give yourself extra time to pack your travel trailer.

Survey the contents of the travel trailer to determine what you already have packed. For example, you might keep pots and pans, sheets or cooking utensils in the trailer at all times. Make a written list of the items so you don't duplicate anything.

Review your camping itinerary to determine what the campground accommodations will provide and what you'll need for activities you have planned. Write a list of items you need specific to the location, such as a grate for cooking over a campfire, life jackets for water activities, extension cords or a generator if electrical hookups aren't available. Write down general items, such as clothing, tools, utensils, cooking supplies, food, bedding, towels, toiletries and medications.

Organize the camping items into groups, such as kitchen supplies, bathroom items, clothing and supplies you'll use outdoors while camping. Pack the items in logical areas based on their uses. For example, pack the kitchen items near the travel trailer's stove and the toiletries in the camper's bathroom. Place items you'll use outdoors, such as campfire roasting sticks, extension cords and lanterns, in a plastic tub to keep them from rolling around.

Pack all items low to the floor, especially heavy things. This keeps the overall weight lower for easier towing and prevents heavy items from falling down from a high shelf or cabinet during travel.

Line the travel trailer's shelves with a liner that helps hold items in place so the contents don't shift very much while driving. Use plastic bins or dividers on the shelves and in drawers to keep things in place.

Latch cabinet doors securely after packing. Add child safety locks or bungee cords to the handles if the doors don't latch well.

#### **Items you will need**

1. Plastic tubs
2. Shelf liner
3. Shelf divider
4. Child safety locks
5. Bungee cords

#### **TIP**

1. Keep your packing list as short as possible to minimize the weight in the travel trailer. You'll also be able to find what you need more easily if you don't have to dig through extra items.

## **Trailer Axle: Use Springs? Or Torsion Axle**

In the discussion of trailer axle leaf springs versus a torsion axle, let's put some engineering behind the debate. I don't want to change opinions, but I would like to offer perspective. I have not seen this kind of analysis in other places, so maybe it will help you too? One more perspective on "Why and When to choose one style over the other."

If you spend time around trailer folks, you probably hear some debate about different trailer axle styles. There seems to be a pretty strong camp that prefers a spring style (usually leaf springs), and a similarly strong minded group that prefers the torsion axle. Who's Right?

The question should not be "Who's right?", but rather "When is it right?" to use one type over the other?

Let's look at some of the arguments.

#### **Leaf Spring Axles**

Though there are many spring style trailer axle configurations, leaf springs are by far the most common. We'll leave the research into other spring types for you.

The name comes from the leaf springs (several stacked, flat spring steel "leaves") between the axle and the trailer. The image here shows this well, and also a pretty standard axle

configuration using leaf springs.

For leaf spring axles, these are the normal arguments:

1. More robust axle support.
2. Systems are less expensive — originally, as well as for repair.
3. More serviceable, and much more available if you ever need something.
4. No internal rubber piece to get stiff and decay with age.
5. When leaf spring systems wear, you can see it happening and take corrective action before they fail.
6. Higher load capacity.
7. Simpler loading on the main beam where the axle connects.
8. Available in dozens of configurations and choices, often right off the shelf.

Dexter and many others provide a host of trailer axle options and configurations. Interestingly, leaf spring types are the most common axles everywhere. (I suppose there is a reason for that.)

### Torsion Axle

The name torsion axle comes from the resistance to a moment load inside the trailer axle tube. Basically, each trailer wheel mounts to a short trailing arm which pivots around the main axle tube. The rotation of the trailing arm is resisted by a set of elastomer rods (many people call them cords).

The axle itself does not twist like a vehicle torsion bar, so the name is a little misleading, but there is a torque, and there is rotational resistance, so the name sticks. or a Torsion Axle, these are the big reasons:

1. They tend to be quieter in action.
2. Independent wheel movement.
3. More responsive to small bumps — giving a nicer ride.
4. Because of the rubber, they damp vibration better.
5. Often, the metal treatment of the tubes resists corrosion better (in corrosive environments).
6. Some claim tire wear is better (that may have less to do with the axle).
7. Easier mounting, directly to the frame.
8. Certain configurations offer a little more ground clearance than with leaf spring style axles.

Like with spring style axles, there are many manufacturers that make torsions. Some have adjustable arm positions, some don't. Some have higher brackets or other special features. Overall a torsion trailer axle is more expensive and often you must special order them for your application.

### So, Who is Right? Which is better?

We could spend some time and debunk or argue the points above (for both trailer axle types), but that's not our point. Personally, I argue that both sides are right — within their scope. In other words, there are right times and situations for each trailer axle style.

### Trailer Axle Loading

From an engineering perspective, a big reason for trailer axle choice is in the loading — from two perspectives.

**First**, when we examine the trailer frame in the area where the axle mounts, loading on the trailer frame is quite different for a torsion axle as compared to a leaf spring style. See below.

**Second**, when using multiple axles, torsions don't "load share". That means, as you go over a bump, the wheel up on the bump can end up carrying nearly all the weight, with the other axle(s) carries much less. It's only a short time overload, but perhaps severe — and if fully loaded, it can actually pop tires!

# Outsmart Summer Camping Crowds With These Tips

By Amanda Watson

*Don't let the crowds get you down this summer. Follow these simple tips for a fun, relaxed and stress-free camping trip.*

Summer camping season is officially here. All across the country families, couples, and rugged single guys armed with their trusty hammocks are gearing up for long weekends and extended vacations in the great outdoors.

Seasoned campers know how crazy campgrounds can get at the height of summer vacation. From Memorial Day to Labor Day the most popular spots are jam-packed with people all clamoring for the best site with a view.

Don't let the masses get you down. Outsmart the crowds with these simple tips for the best summer camping season ever!

## Make reservations

The first tip for beating the crowds is to make a campground reservation. Securing a reservation takes the stress out of summer camping. Knowing that you have a place to sleep after spending all day driving often means the difference between a stressful or relaxed first day of vacation. Most campgrounds (both private and public) take reservations up to a year in advance.

There are a few things to keep in mind before you make a campground reservation.

- **What is the the cancellation policy?** Most campgrounds charge a cancellation fee ranging from a few bucks to a half of the total (or more). The cancellation fee usually increases the closer you get to your reservation time, and some private campgrounds don't offer refunds at all, so knowing the policy is a must before you make a reservation.
- **Are you reserving a specific site or just a spot in the campground?** Reservation systems vary from campground to campground. Sometimes you can choose from available sites while reserving, and sometimes you simply reserve a spot in the campground and are either assigned a site or choose one upon arrival. If you are not reserving a specific spot make sure the campground knows the size of your RV and any preferences you have in regards to utilities.
- **Is your site suitable for your needs?** If you are making an online reservation for a campground where you can choose a site, be sure to fill out the fields for RV length and utility options. If you reserve a 20' long site and show up with your 45' motorhome, changing sites might not be possible.
- **No spots available? Check back frequently for cancellations.** Since many people make reservations early, they also cancel those reservations frequently. While cancellations are not always easy to snap up, checking the reservation system often can result in a lucky find, and sometimes campgrounds have a waiting list that will notify you when a cancellation appears.

Don't like to plan ahead? Try for a first-come, first-served site. Not everyone likes to make reservations. I get it. Planning ahead is not always practical, nor does it lend well to spontaneous vacations. I personally prefer not to make reservations and only do so when I know it to be a necessity (like that time we wanted to spend Labor Day weekend at Glacier National Park).

Luckily, for those of us who prefer to live and camp on a less rigid schedule, many campgrounds offer first-come, first-served options. This basically means that some or all sites are not reservable and only available to those who show up in person. The majority of state and national park campgrounds have at least a few sites set aside that cannot be reserved.

And many national forest campgrounds do not take reservations at all, instead of keeping all sites as first-come, first-served.

Of course, the risk to trying to snag a first-come, first-served site is that you might show up and find that all the sites are already taken. Avoid this problem by following these simple tips.

- Show up early—before 10 am if possible. Pro tip: Find a close campground or parking lot to spend the previous night so you can zip over first thing to claim a spot.
- Most people go home on Sunday. Use this to your advantage. Plan to arrive on a Sunday or Monday morning for the best chance of getting a site.
- Call the campground in the morning to see if any sites are available. They won't usually hold a site for you, but at least you'll know it's worth driving over to check it out.
- Have an alternate plan. First-come, first-served sites at some popular campgrounds can be very hard to get. The campgrounds at places like Zion and Yellowstone National Park usually fill up everyday before noon. Always assume you won't get a site, have an alternate place to stay, and be very happy if you do get a site.

Seek out alternatives to the most popular campgrounds The most popular campgrounds tend to be those near a beach or national park. These coveted locations often turn into mad houses during the busy summer camping season. Beat the crowds by seeking out more remote campgrounds a short distance from these popular locations.

Instead of a beachside campground, how about one that is a 20-minute drive away? Or instead of staying inside a national park, why not find a campground in a nearby town or national forest?

Use websites like RV Park Reviews to find smaller, less well-known campgrounds. Consider city parks or national forest campgrounds as an alternative to large resort style campgrounds or state parks.

Consider boondocking Finally, if you really want to avoid the crowds, the hassle of making reservations, or competing for a few coveted sites, consider camping without the campground. It's a practice commonly called boondocking, and if you don't mind foregoing a few luxuries (because you know the pool will be overflowing with kids everyday anyway), this is the perfect solution to busy campgrounds.

There's a lot to know about boondocking, and it's not practical for everyone or in every place, but when the summer camping crowds get out of control this is a sure-fire way to find some peace and quiet in out of the way, scenic locations.

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