



CAR CARE CORNER

Program Offers A Crash Course In Handling Auto Accidents



(NAPSA)—Experts say traffic accidents can be among the most stressful events a person can experience. Fortunately, a new program has been created to help drivers deal with that stress more effectively.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), there were over 6 million traffic accidents reported to police in 2004. That breaks down to more than 11 accidents per minute; by the time you finish reading this article, over 30 auto accidents will have taken place, and that doesn't include the minor fender benders that go unreported.

Whether it's due to Mother Nature, mechanical failure or the guy behind you trying to balance a cell phone conversation with a cup of coffee, the unfortunate reality is that it's easy to become one of these statistics at some point in your daily commute.

If that collision does happen, many insurance companies offer some kind of roadside assistance plan to customers, often as part of a special package or a stand-alone service for an additional charge.

However, recent reports have shown that using these insurer-based services may ultimately lead to higher insurance premiums. Those same reports also bring to light the often-over-

looked manufacturer-based roadside assistance programs and the many benefits they can offer motorists. Aside from having no effect on insurance premiums, they can offer better towing options, a wider range of services and are almost always included for the duration of the vehicle's warranty, as is the case with the plan offered by Ford Motor Company.

"We like to think of our Roadside Assistance Program as a paramedic for your car," said Ford Customer Service Division's George Gilbert.

The program is available on every new vehicle the company offers, be it a lease or purchase. It comes at no additional cost, it's valid for the duration of the vehicle's standard warranty and it offers drivers a variety of services that aren't just limited to warranty issues.

"Many people think a manufacturer roadside program is just to assist them if their car breaks down, but we're here to help our customers in just about every situation imaginable," said Gilbert.

For example, towing services to dealerships up to 35 miles away can be obtained for any purpose, including accidents. In the event of an accident, the program offers motorists the convenience of a sin-

gle call to help manage the mayhem, from police dispatching (if necessary) to towing services, emergency services and even repair arrangements. The plan can also assist drivers in more benign situations, such as a flat tire or keys locked in a vehicle. If you run out of fuel or need a jump start, customer service representatives can coordinate with local services to get you back on the road with minimal delay. The service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and is valid anywhere in the United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Manufacturer roadside programs such as the one found at Ford Motor Company offer convenience, confidence and reliability to customers in one comprehensive package, all while offering a cost savings over many insurer-provided assistance programs.

Using a factory-based roadside program can help get your car to the people who know it best, and by insisting on genuine original equipment manufacturer parts for your repair, you will help ensure your vehicle is returned to its former glory. When that unexpected collision occurs, take a moment and reach for the companion that came with your car; it's the onboard "paramedic" that's ready to take care of you in your time of need.