

Your “Check Engine” Light On? Don’t Panic!

(NAPSA)—You’re driving alone late at night and you’re miles from home when suddenly, without warning, your “Check Engine” light comes on.

What should you do?

Immediately pull over to the side of the road, turn off the engine and call for emergency road assistance?

Keep driving in the belief that it’s something trivial such as a loose gas cap and you’ll tend to it when you have a minute?

Ignore it, thinking it’s a minor “glitch” that will fix itself, hoping to avoid costly repairs—especially if your car is out of warranty?

According to auto-industry statistics, more than 8 percent of all vehicles on the road today have their “Check Engine” lights on. The most common reason for this is a loose gas cap. In fact, about 17 percent of vehicles have either gas caps loose, damaged or missing.

An illuminated “Check Engine” light, however, can be caused by several problems—from loose gas caps to engine misfires to more serious matters. So it’s nothing to be taken lightly. At the same time, it’s not something one should panic about.

Automotive vehicles dating from 1996 to the present, including cars, light trucks, minivans and SUVs, are equipped with an onboard diagnostic system.

Mandated by the U.S. government to limit a vehicle’s emissions output, this sophisticated computer system monitors and adjusts dozens of components and processes. It won’t tell you your



A light, handheld device can help you diagnose some of the problems that could be causing your “Check Engine” light to go on.

tires are wearing thin, but it will monitor about 80 percent of your car’s operating systems.

When the computer finds a problem that it can’t correct, it turns on your “Check Engine” light, thereby serving as an early warning device.

If the light remains illuminated while you are driving, there is no need to panic. It’s simply an indicator that you should have your vehicle checked.

You should not continue driving for prolonged periods, nor should you embark on a lengthy road trip without seeing your mechanic. Also, if your vehicle is due for a state emissions test, an illuminated light is a good indicator that your car will fail. In some states, it’s an automatic failure.

A blinking or flashing “Check Engine” light requires more prompt attention as it may indicate a more serious problem. If

that occurs, minimize driving at high speeds or under heavy loads and see a trained service technician to prevent costly damage to your vehicle.

A good rule of thumb is to refer to your vehicle’s service manual for what to do. There are other easy ways to diagnose hidden problems yourself and ensure that your car remains road-trip ready. One of these is the CarMD (www.CarMD.com) diagnostic device that employs the same basic technology used by mechanics to diagnose and remedy light problems.

The handheld device plugs into a vehicle’s OBD II port (usually found beneath the dashboard) and quickly scans for potential problems. The software that comes with the tool helps decode those problems in easy-to-understand language, along with probable causes, probable fixes and estimated repair costs.

Considering that most mechanics generally charge upwards of \$100 or more to run similar tests, a device like CarMD, priced at \$89.99, can save both time and money. Additionally, it gives you the upper hand in knowing the problem and estimated repair cost before your mechanic presents you with a detailed and most likely costly repair estimate.

So next time your light comes on, don’t become alarmed. It’s there for a purpose—to help you drive safer.

For more information, visit www.CarMD.com or call (888) MyCarMD (888-692-2763).