

Click the cap to keep your fuel system happy

Driving Force. You know you're supposed to tighten the fuel cap. But do you know what happens when you don't?

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There are two things to remember when filling up your car: tighten the fuel cap until it clicks, and don't top off the tank. Both of these are important because of your vehicle's emissions system, which helps to keep unburned gasoline vapors from escaping and polluting the air.

"The fuel system is a closed system so that vapors don't escape," says John-Paul Farag, manager of advanced technology and powertrain for Toyota Canada. "The clicks (on the fuel cap) ensure that you have a nice, tight seal."

If the cap isn't sealed tightly, special sensors will detect the pressure loss and can alert you by illuminating the "check engine" light on the dash.

"It's not necessarily something wrong with the engine," Farag says. The light could mean that a loose gas cap is setting off a sensor that's monitoring the emissions controls. Some vehicles have a specific warning light for a loose cap.

If your check engine light comes on, try tightening the cap. If that was the cause, it will probably go out after you've stopped and started the ignition several times. A light that stays solid is often minor, but if it flashes, it's usually something more serious that could leave you stranded.



When you hit the gas station, be sure to follow your car's instructions. www.romeo.com

At the gas station, your vehicle works with the pump to automatically shut off the fuel.

"If you look at the fuel pump nozzle, it usually has a curled piece of metal or a small hole beside the large hole where the fuel comes out," Farag says. Once the tank is full, a filler valve in the vehicle sends a little bit of air or liquid back to the nozzle, which prompts it to shut off. It's important not to keep pumping a little more in. The car's emissions system con-

tains a charcoal canister — as it sounds, a small tank filled with charcoal — which captures stray gasoline vapors in the system. Every so often it purges itself, sending these raw vapors into the engine to be burned off. Topping off the tank could send liquid fuel into the canister, which can damage it.

Overfilling can also cause fuel to pour back out of the tank, which can mark the paint and expose you to dangerous fumes — not to mention the waste to your wallet.

Gas station tips

- Occasionally a gas pump won't co-operate with your car's filler, and will continue to shut off before the tank is full. If this happens, ease up on the trigger and pump the gas in slowly, which will usually solve the problem.
- Don't stand directly over the nozzle when you're filling your car. Gasoline fumes are dangerous and have been linked to long-term health problems such as nervous system damage.

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