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Many Canadian drivers unable to name serious warning signs of brake failure

Kal Tire brake safety awareness survey highlights gap in driver knowledge

VERNON, BC—Squealing, squeaking, screeching and grinding: most drivers recognize these are the sounds of brakes that need attention, but what about the more serious signs, like a fallen brake pedal? A national Kal Tire survey found that while 62 per cent of motorists recognized one obvious warning—the sounds of worn or failing brakes—more serious signs of brake failure were less likely to be identified by drivers.

“Brakes are pretty good at giving clues that they’re becoming worn or at risk of failing,” says Mike Butcher, vice president store operations, Kal Tire. “We want to help drivers recognize all the signs of potential brake problems because the squealing sounds most of us recognize usually point to more minor repairs, where other warning signs—like brakes taking longer to stop—could point to much more serious safety concerns.”

The Kal Tire brake safety awareness study, which polled 2,544 Canadian motorists* responsible for their vehicle’s maintenance, found few drivers were able to name the more serious warning signs of brake failure: brakes taking longer to stop (only 33 per cent), a low or fallen brake pedal (13 per cent), the brake warning light illuminating (10 per cent), or the vehicle pulling to one side when braking (5 per cent).

“If your brake pedal is soft or falls to the floor when braking, it could be a sign there’s air in your system or a mechanical failure,” says Butcher. “If you notice a pull to the left or right when you apply the brakes, it could mean your calipers or wheel cylinders are seized, and the dashboard symbol for brakes tends to light up if there’s a loss of brake fluid or hydraulic failure. These are all serious because they can affect your braking distance and should be inspected right away.”

The survey also found drivers with older vehicles were less diligent about brake care: Only 50 per cent of those with vehicles made in 2010 or earlier had brakes inspected in the last year compared to 61 per cent of those with vehicles made in 2020-2024.

“An annual brake check and proactive maintenance can help extend the life of those parts and help keep your brakes working safely for the benefit of everyone,” says Butcher, noting Kal Tire now offers easy online appointment bookings for free brake inspections.

Other key survey findings:

- In Edmonton, 31 per cent of respondents indicated they couldn’t name any warning signs brakes need to be serviced or inspected (compared to 27 per cent in Montreal, 22 per cent in Calgary and 17 per cent in St. John’s, where respondents couldn’t name any signs).
- Quebec and Atlantic Canada were the most likely to have proactive brake inspections performed (62-63 per cent had brakes checked in the last year), while Prairie drivers were the least diligent about proactive brake inspections at 52 per cent.

To help ensure brake safety and longevity, drivers are encouraged to have their brakes checked once a year and as soon as they notice a change in performance or sounds.

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*A total of 2,544 Canadian motorists who are responsible for maintaining and servicing their own vehicles were surveyed from March 27-April 10, 2024. The results are considered accurate within $\pm 2\%$, 19 times out of 20.

About Kal Tire

Kal Tire is one of Canada's largest independent tire dealers and one of North America's largest commercial tire dealers. Kal Tire's Mining Tire Group is an international leader in mining tire service and supply, servicing more than 150 mine sites across five continents. The company has warehouse facilities across Canada servicing more than 260 Kal Tire retail and commercial stores. Kal Tire owns and operates 11 truck tire retread facilities across Canada, plus six earthmover retreading facilities located in Canada, the United Kingdom, Chile, Ghana and Mexico. The company employs more than 6,500 team members. For more information, visit www.KalTire.com.

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Additional media resources:

Infographic: [6 signs your brakes need an inspection](#)

Article: [Signs you may need new brakes](#)

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