Headline: Road deicers cause billions of dollars in damage

Deckhead: Majority of Americans at risk for costly, dangerous rust problems

Pay now. Or pay later.

That might be the best way to describe the winter-driving season.

Slick roadways are the primary cause of thousands of car crashes annually. Road crews work before, during and after snowstorms to plow and deice roads. Salts and other chemicals are used to melt snow and ice and allow drivers to safely reach their destinations.

It’s an invaluable process but it doesn’t come without a price. Millions of Americans are confronted with expensive vehicle repairs from rust damage caused by chemicals used to the clear roadways.

A AAA survey found that drivers paid more than $15 billion in rust repairs caused by deicing methods over a five-year period. AAA warns drivers to take actions to prevent dangerous rust-related damage to brake lines, fuel tanks, exhaust systems and other critical components.

AAA urges drivers, who experience any of the following vehicle malfunctions, to immediately move it from the road to a safe location and have it towed to a trusted repair facility.

* In-dash warning lights for brakes and other critical systems.
* A “spongey” or soft feeling when applying pressure to the brake pedal.
* An unusually loud exhaust sound or the smell of fumes in or around the vehicle.
* The prominent smell of gasoline or diesel fuel when the vehicle is parked or running.

Many state and local transportation departments have shifted from using rock salt to liquid deicers to combat hazardous road conditions. The alternatives have proved to be more effective than traditional salt because they can be applied before a snowstorm, have a lower freezing point and quickly melt ice and snow.

These same characteristics, however, can be even more damaging to vehicles since the chemicals remain in liquid form longer and are more likely to coat components and seep into cracks and crevices where corrosion can accelerate.

AAA recommends drivers take the following preventative steps to reduce vehicle damage:

* Limit driving immediately before, during and after winter storms when salt and deicing solutions are being applied and are at their highest concentrations.
* Frequently wash your vehicle, paying attention to the undercarriage. This will loosen, dissolve and neutralize road salts.
* Use quality car-wash solution, not a household dish detergent that will strip wax from the vehicle.
* Repair body damage and touch up paint scratches and chips that expose bare metal that could lead to rust.
* Thoroughly wash and clean the vehicle before the start of winter and apply a coat of wax to protect the finish.
* And give the vehicle and undercarriage a methodical cleaning in the spring. Deposits left over from the winter can continue to cause corrosion year-round if they aren’t properly removed.

The winter-driving season is a conundrum for all motorists. Unkempt roads are more likely to lead to crashes and treated ones could lead to other forms of damage at later dates.

Responsible driving and proper car care can eliminate headaches and keep motorists from paying now – or later.

Cutline: CLEARING THE WAY – Rock salt is used to clear millions of miles of road throughout the U.S. It’s an effective measure, but it could cause rust damage to vehicles. Image: robsonphoto. Adobe Stock.