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### Cleaning Up your Car Before and After that Road Trip

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Wear and tear on our vehicle's interior starts long before we even realize the damage is being done. This is especially true when taking those long road trips. You know the scenario: You return home from a fabulous summer vacation. When you unpack the car, you realize it looks as if you have been on the road forever. Between wear and tear and food and drink spills, the car seats look like they've been run over. If you are anything like I am with my "baby," you must clean it up, right away! Before permanent damage sets in. But where do you start?

The leather experts from *Fibrenew*, a leather, vinyl and plastics refurbishing specialist, provide a few tips for car owners about how to handle the Top Vacation Roadtrip Spills. Below are *The Do's and Don'ts of Road Trip Clean Up*.

According to Michael Wilson, CEO of Fibrenew, "Once the summer vacation season kicks off, we receive a lot of calls from car owners wondering what can be done about the damage to their leather and vinyl seats." Drivers and passengers alike are often not very successful at trying to juggle food, drinks and toys on the road. The worst problems are caused by car owners who don't know the best ways to clean up a mess and repair a problem.

## BEFORE THE ROADTRIP BEGINS

Before you pack the car for your trip, it is a good idea to clean and protect the seats. Dirt, oil and dust don't do any favors to leather and vinyl seats, and act like a fine sandpaper, slowly wearing down the vinyl and the protective coating on the leather, making them more susceptible to damage. Once the surface is weakened, leather and vinyl is more likely to crack and fade and it won't hold up well to everyday wear and tear.

Therefore, it's very important to purchase a good leather or vinyl cleaning kit, which include leather/vinyl cleaning and protection cream, or just a cleaner. Applying these creams or cleaners before you make your trip is a good way to prevent damage to leather or vinyl surfaces. It will also save time and money later on; that is, of course, if you care about maintaining your vehicle's interior. Bring along an absorbent towel or two, as well as one or two rolls of paper towels.

## TOP VACATION ROADTRIP SPILLS (and how to clean them!)\*

1) **FOOD OR DRINK STAIN:** Passengers-or the driver-eat a pizza slice or burger and only part of it lands in the mouth, the rest goes you know where: on the car seat. The drink follows. **AVOID** using window/mirror cleaner because it contains alcohol which will dissolve and destroy the surface coating on your leather. **DO** use a damp towel to wipe up the mess and a dry one to finish the job. Fully-finished leather is pretty much water resistant, so a little spill isn't going to hurt as long as you clean it up quickly.

2) **INK:** The use of bright markers gets on the corner of the car seat. **DON'T** use dish soap or hair spray to remove the marks. The degreasing agents in dish soap can permanently de-gloss and damage the top coating on the leather surface. Hair spray, another commonly recommended remedy, has alcohol in it and will ruin the surface coating on your leather. **DO** use a soft sponge and specialized leather cleaner.

3) **NAIL POLISH:** **AVOID** using nail polish (or remover) in the car because it will take all of the color out of your leather and leave a bleached spot bigger than the nail polish spot. Instead, use a soft sponge and leather cleaner. However you will most likely have to call a professional for help to get rid of this stain.

4) **ANIMAL SCRATCHES AND PICKS:** **DON'T** touch up the spots with shoe polish or markers because it makes an ugly, sticky mess. Rather, **DO** try to reduce the visibility of the problem by snipping off the cotton interior strands that often get pulled out when leather gets picked. **DO** use a hair dryer and massage minor scratches with leather cleaner to try to rub it out. Call a professional to fix larger scratches and holes – this is not a DIY kind of job.

Once you return home, clean out the car, especially if you have been at the beach. The sand and salt from the beach can not only damage your leather and vinyl seats, over time it will be ground into the carpet and become almost impossible to remove. That means the salty sea smell will stick around, too. Use the leather cleaner on the seats. In most cases, a good vacuuming will remove the sand and salt. If sea water has landed in the car and really soaked the carpet, it might be wise to get the carpets washed.

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