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How To Clean Spills During Family Summer Vacation Road Trips

Posted By [Michael Wilson](#) On April 19, 2012 @ 6:00 pm In [Articles](#) | [No Comments](#)

It's as much an American tradition as baseball and apple pie. In fact, in many cases, the tradition often involves watching a baseball game and eating apple pie along the way.

We're talking about the family Summer Vacation.

However when the trip is over and you are unpacking the car, it's clear that between the wear and tear and food and drink spills, the interior looks like it has been run over.

In fact, the leather and vinyl seats look like they are in need of their own type of vacation.

It's got to be cleaned up, but where do you start on the road trip clean up?

First, be careful. My experience shows that while kids and adults trying to juggle food, drinks and toys on the road can cause damage to car seats, very often the worst problems are caused by car owners who don't know the best ways to clean up a mess and repair a problem.

So here's a list of how to clean spills during the summer vacation road trip.

BEFORE THE ROAD TRIP BEGINS

Before you pack the car for the big trip, it's a good idea to clean and protect the seats.

Dirt, oil and dust that get on leather and vinyl seats acts like a fine sandpaper, slowly wearing down the vinyl and the protective coating on the leather, making them more susceptible to damage. Once it's weakened, leather and vinyl is more likely to crack and fade and it won't hold up well to everyday wear and tear.

Buy a good leather cleaning kit, which includes leather cleaning and protection cream, or a vinyl cleaning kit, which typically includes just a cleaner, and make a protective detour before the trip begins. It will save time and money later on. You should also pack an absorbent towel or two in addition to one or two rolls of paper towels.

Tips for how to clean spills in the car:

- **FOOD OR DRINK STAIN:** The kids eat a pizza slice or burger and while part of it lands in the mouth the rest goes on themselves and the car seat. The drink follows.
- **DON'T** use 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, before it soaks through.
- **INK:** Some of the bright green marker gets to color the skin of the dragon in the coloring book. Some of it misses and now the corner of the car seat looks like the dragon.
- **DON'T** use dish soap or hair spray to remove the marks. The degreasing agent found 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. Buy it at most leather furniture retailers – but, for serious problems, your local Fibrenew franchise can help.
- **NAIL POLISH:** You try out the new bright red polish hoping to look good on the beach but end up polishing some of the car seat.

- DON'T use nail polish remover because it will take all of the color out of your leather and leave a bleached spot bigger than the nail polish spot.
- DO, once again, use a soft sponge and leather cleaner. It's most likely you will need a professional to fully manage this cleanup.
- ANIMAL SCRATCHES AND PICKS: FIDO the dog gets all excited when you get to the rest area and scratches the car seat jumping out the door.
- DON'T touch up the spots with shoe polish or markers because it makes an ugly, sticky mess.
- 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 get home, it's a good idea to 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 as well. Use the leather cleaner mentioned above on the seats.

In most cases, a good vacuuming will remove the sand and salt. If sea water found its way into the car and really soaked the carpet, it might be wise to get the carpets washed as well.

Michael Wilson, CEO of Fibrenew



It's not surprising Michael Wilson would grow a business solution to a serious environmental problem because the outdoors and environment are in his blood.

Wilson was born in New Zealand, graduated from the University of Calgary, and sailed to America on a 29 foot wood boat he built in the UK.

A true adventurer, he has traveled extensively, including spending four winters in the Canadian High Arctic working as a surveyor in the oil industry, before settling in Calgary and starting a family and business. Wilson was attracted to owning his own business and having studied environmental science at university it was only natural he would own a green company.

He also saw the business potential in keeping damaged leathers and plastics out of landfills, while saving customers money by repairing and refurbishing rather than replacing these items.

He purchased the first Fibrenew franchise offered for sale in 1987; and he liked the business so much he bought the company in 1994. Today there are more than 200 franchises in the US, Canada, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand.

Wilson is a widower; has two children and two grandchildren, and besides continuing to grow Fibrenew he divides his free time between family, ocean sailing and walking in the mountains.

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