



## AUTOMOTIVE ENGINEERING

# FACT SHEET



## POTHOLE DAMAGE

### BACKGROUND

Water and traffic—the two agents involved in pothole formation—can be asphalt’s worst enemies. Together they wreak havoc on pavement that has already been compromised by factors like age, overuse, inadequate maintenance and exposure to the elements. Water seepage through surface-layer cracks and other openings can erode the roadbed, which results in the creation of a subsurface cavity. When vehicles roll over the weakened area, the surface layer crumbles into the gap beneath and a pothole materializes.

Flat tires, bent wheels and damage suspension components all are common automotive issues caused by pothole run-ins. AAA recommends visiting a AAA [Approved Auto Repair](#) facility or certified technician to assess and fix any pothole damage.

### KEY FINDINGS

According to a recent AAA survey:

- **Two-thirds (64 percent) of U.S. drivers are concerned about potholes on local roadways.**
  - 74 percent of drivers in the Northeast
  - 68 percent of drivers in the Midwest
  - 61 percent of drivers in the South
  - 57 percent of drivers in the West
- **Drivers ages 45 and older are more likely to be concerned about potholes than younger drivers (ages 18-44).**
- **More than half of drivers with household incomes of less than \$75,000 annually are “very concerned” about potholes.** Only one-third of drivers with household incomes of \$75,000 or more annually report the same level of concern.
- **Vehicle repair bills related to pothole damage have cost U.S. drivers \$15 billion over the last five years; or an average of \$3 billion annually.**
- **15 percent of U.S. drivers (16 million motorists) report sustaining vehicle damage that required repair as a result of hitting a pothole at least once in the last five years.**
  - 20 percent of drivers in the Northeast
  - 16 percent of drivers in the South
  - 15 percent of drivers in the West
  - 10 percent of drivers in the Midwest
- **Nearly one-third (31 percent) of drivers aged 35-44 report incurring pothole-related vehicle damage that required repair in the last five years, more than any other age group.**
- **U.S. drivers that experienced pothole damage that required repair had it happen an average of three times in the last five years.**
- **U.S. drivers report an average repair bill of \$306 to repair pothole damage to their vehicle.** Sixty-four percent report repair bills of \$250 or less, 30 percent report bills greater than \$250 and up to \$1,000, and 6 percent report bills in excess of \$1,000.

To understand how pothole damage affects drivers, AAA pursued three lines of inquiry:

1. **How concerned are U.S. drivers about potholes on local roadways?**
2. **How common is pothole-related vehicle damage?**
3. **How much does the repair of pothole-related vehicle damage cost U.S. drivers annually?**



## COMMON TYPES OF POTHOLE-RELATED VEHICLE DAMAGE

### TIRES:

When damaged by a pothole, tires are commonly cut, torn or punctured in a way that is not salvageable. A new tire can cost less than \$100 to over \$500 depending on the vehicle.

### WHEELS:

The force of a pothole strike can bend or break wheels in a way that cannot be professionally repaired. In that case, a driver can expect to spend \$300 or more for each replacement wheel. Loss of balance weights is also a common form of pothole damage and necessitates tire/wheel assembly rebalancing, typically costing less than \$50.

### SUSPENSIONS:

Potholes can also inflict expensive suspension-related damage. Vehicles with damaged suspensions may have bent or broken parts that require attention, resulting in repair bills that could add up to \$1,000 or more. Minor suspension issues may be addressed by suspension realignment, costing an average of \$75 to \$150.

### HIGH COST OF POTHOLE DAMAGE



**\$15 BILLION** Total vehicle repair costs due to pothole damage over the last 5 years

**\$300** The average vehicle repair bill for pothole damage

Total vehicle repair costs due to pothole damage over the last 5 years

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## AAA RECOMMENDATIONS

- Since tires are the only “cushion” between a pothole and a vehicle, it’s critical to ensure that tires are properly inflated and have adequate tread depth.
- To avoid striking a pothole, remain alert, scan the road ahead and drive at least 3-4 seconds behind the vehicle ahead.
- When a pothole encounter is unavoidable, slow down as much as possible but release the brakes and straighten the steering wheel before striking the pothole.
- Check to see if your vehicle is equipped with a spare tire or a tire inflator kit. Ensure the spare tire is properly inflated or understand [tire inflator kit instructions and limitations](#) before trouble strikes.
- When faced with a flat tire, AAA members can request assistance at (800) AAA-HELP, by visiting [AAA.com/RoadsideAssistance](http://AAA.com/RoadsideAssistance) or via the [AAA Mobile App](#).

## METHODOLOGY

### For survey data related to the cost of pothole damage:

A telephone survey was conducted Q1, 2016 using two probability samples: randomly selected landline telephone numbers and randomly selected mobile (cell) telephone numbers. The combined sample consists of 1,007 adults (18 years old and older) living in the continental United States. Of the 1,007 interviews, 507 were from the landline sample and 500 from the cell phone sample. The margin of error for the sample of 1,007 is +/- 3.09% at the 95% confidence level.

### For survey data related to American concern levels of potholes on local roadways:

A telephone survey was conducted Q3, 2015 using two probability samples: randomly selected landline telephone numbers and randomly selected mobile (cell) telephone numbers. The combined sample consists of 1,008 adults (18 years old and older) living in the continental United States. Of the 1,008 interviews, 508 were from the landline sample and 500 from the cell phone sample. The margin of error for the sample of 1,008 is +/- 3.09% at the 95% confidence level.