



STATE OF NEW MEXICO
Office of Superintendent of Insurance
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**PREVENT SPARKING DISASTER: PRACTICE PROPER VEHICLE MAINTENANCE
DURING WILDFIRE AWARENESS MONTH**

SANTA FE, N.M. – As part of its Wildfire Awareness Month news release series throughout May, the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance (OSI) is reminding New Mexico residents to stay vigilant of activities that can unintentionally spark wildfire if proper precautions are not taken

As dry conditions persist across the state, OSI is urging motorists to practice proper vehicle maintenance, as many human-caused fire hazards can stem from mechanical car failures or improper towing. These are leading causes of roadside fires, where a single spark or a hot exhaust system can ignite a catastrophic blaze in seconds.

One of the most preventable causes of roadside fires is dragging trailer chains. The following safety techniques are recommended to mitigate issues related to trailer chains:

- **Cross the chains:** Attach chains in an "X" pattern under the trailer tongue to create a "cradle" that catches the coupler if it detaches.
- **Twist to shorten:** Take up slack by twisting chains until they are at least five inches above the ground, ensuring they are not too tight for turns.
- **Check the hook direction:** Ensure "S" hooks face away from the vehicle and toward the trailer to prevent them from bouncing off.
- **Use chain guards:** Consider spark-resistant hoses or commercial guards to cover metal links.

Residents should ensure regular vehicle maintenance to mitigate sparks and potential fire. Friction and metal-on-metal contact are high-risk ignition sources. Motorists are advised to:

- **Monitor tire pressure:** Underinflated tires cause extreme heat buildup. If a tire fails, the exposed metal rim striking the pavement can throw sparks into dry vegetation.
- **Maintain brakes:** Worn brake pads can lead to metal-on-metal contact, creating a shower of dangerous sparks.
- **Service wheel bearings:** Ensure trailer wheel bearings are greased to prevent overheating and mechanical failure.

OSI also reminds residents that, per New Mexico [state law](#), all off-highway vehicles (OHVs), like ATVs, dirt bikes, and ROVs, must be equipped with a U.S. Forest Service-approved spark arrestor to operate on public lands. Owners of OHVs should regularly clean and ensure efficiency of arrestors, as well as verify aftermarket parts (most motocross bikes lack factory spark arrestors. You must install a qualified unit before riding on public trails).

“It can seem like a mundane task, but a single moment of maintenance – like checking your tire pressure or crossing your chains – is the kind of daily action that is needed to help prevent sparks and potential fire,” said Melissa Robertson, Bureau Chief, Property and Casualty Bureau, OSI. “And if you notice sparks or a fire starting from your vehicle, pull over immediately to an area clear of vegetation and call the fire department. In our arid climate, a single spark is all it takes to change a landscape forever.”

For more information about wildfire preparedness and insurance resources from OSI, visit [this page](#).

For more information about wildfire prevention and defensible space from New Mexico’s Forestry Division (EMNRD) visit [this page](#).

Residents can also visit [this page](#) to review the Wildfire Prepared Home program.

***Media Note:** In-person interviews are available in Santa Fe. Virtual interviews via Teams and phone interviews are also available.*

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About the Office of the Superintendent of Insurance

The Office of the Superintendent of Insurance (OSI) is New Mexico’s regulatory agency responsible for overseeing a wide range of insurance products, including private health and life insurance, auto, home, business, and title insurance. Bureaus within OSI that assist with disaster and wildfire-related insurance are the Property and Casualty Bureau – which reviews and renders determinations on property and casualty rates, rules, and form filings – and the Consumer Assistance Bureau, which has specialized knowledge in the insurance claims and complaint process and assists consumers with their insurance disputes, as well as educates consumers for a better understanding of their policies and coverages.