

## Potholes and underinflated tires can be a costly and dangerous combination, AAA says



A pothole on Merrick Road outside Bellmore Towing & Complete Automotive Repair in Bellmore on Friday. Credit: Newsday / Howard Schnapp

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After her two-mile morning walk in chilly March temperatures, Patty Schwartz, 67, of Merrick, drove her husband's sedan to Bellmore Towing & Complete Automotive Repair on Merrick Road to have its windshield wipers changed on Friday.

But what started as a single reason to visit the auto shop quickly turned into two — after a free tire pressure check for AAA members in which Schwartz learned she'd been driving with 27 pounds per square inch — 6 points lower than recommended 33 PSI.

"I'm glad I stopped," she said.

Many drivers are often not aware of their car's low tire pressure, which can be dangerous during the month of March, or pothole season, said Robert Sinclair, senior manager of public affairs for AAA Northeast.

In partnership with Michelin, members of AAA — coincidentally near a pothole — provided free tire checks at a Check and Fill event on Friday morning as a way to avoid pothole damage.

"The National Highway Safety Traffic Administration says that 80% of drivers are driving around on at least one improperly inflated tire," Sinclair said.

March is one of the three worst months for flat tires, Sinclair said. In December and January, AAA responded to more than 10,000 flat tire calls in New York City and on Long Island.

"Every 10 degrees the outside air temperature goes down, you lose about 1 PSI of pressure in your tires," Sinclair said.

"You combine that with the fact that tires normally aspirate about 1 PSI a month ... so you might go from being underinflated to dangerously underinflated."

### Tire dangers

A recent report by the [transportation research group TRIP](#) said driving over rough, potholed roads adds an extra \$694 to the average driver's vehicle maintenance bill, Newsday previously reported.

But a flat tire can sometimes be a matter of life and death, Sinclair said.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 11,000 tire-related crashes happen in the United States annually. In 2022, a total of 562 people died on the road in tire-related crashes, the agency said.

Last year in New York City and on Long Island, AAA responded to 61,250 flat tire calls. Not surprisingly, with its abundance of potholes, March is one of the worst months for flat tires, along with December and January, with more than 5,600 flat tire calls each.

Vehicles manufactured after 2007 have a tire pressure monitoring system that indicates when a tire's recommended PSI is too low. However, these systems can vary depending on the car's make and model.

"By the time it gets that low, it's really too low. You're in a dangerous situation," Sinclair said. "So, if you see that light ... take care of it immediately."

Eric Schmedding, product category manager of Michelin, said drivers should manually check their tire pressures once a month and inspect the tire for any kind of wear and tear.

"Sensors do go bad over time," he said.

Schmedding said motorists should check for a car's recommended PSI, or pounds per square inch, on the inside sticker of the driver's door, not the PSI number on the inside of the tire.

Newsday previously reported that about 30% of the metropolitan area's roads are in "poor" condition, compared with about 25% statewide.

Owners of electric vehicles especially need to be aware of tire pressure, as their torque and weight are heavier than conventional vehicles', both Sinclair and Schmedding said. Although many gas-powered vehicles have recommended PSI in the 30s, electric vehicles have PSIs in the 40s.

There are too many potholes on Long Island roads that "need to be fixed," Schwartz said.

"I'm glad I'm here today," she said.