

« JUST THE FACTS »

Vehicle Warning Lights

Vehicle warning or indicator lights are not new but what these lamps are telling us has changed along with vehicle technology. The following list is by no means comprehensive, and the indicator images are not necessarily universal (automakers do differ so the owner's manual should always be consulted), but these should provide a fair cross section as to what may appear on a vehicle's dash.



Oil Pressure Warning: If this light stays lit it indicates loss of oil pressure. Immediately check oil level and pressure.



Coolant Temp Warning: Indicates temperature has exceeded normal limits. Check coolant level, fan operation, radiator cap, coolant leaks.



Battery/Charging Alert: Indicates voltage level is below normal level and the vehicle's charging system is not functioning properly. Check battery terminals, alternator belt, and battery condition.



Check Engine or Malfunction Indicator Light (MIL): Indicates the engine computer has set a Diagnostic Trouble Code (DTC). Usually requires diagnosis with a professional scan tool.



Reduced Power Warning: Indicates Engine Computer has limited engine power output. The ECM has many levels of reduced power depending on what component has failed in its control system. Usually requires diagnosis with a professional scan tool.



Transmission Temperature: Transmission is operating at higher than optimum temperature as transmission fluid is hotter than normal. Check transmission fluid level and engine coolant level.



Overdrive Light: This symbol indicates that the vehicle's overdrive system has been manually turned off. Typically the overdrive system is controlled by an on/off switch.



Fog Lamp: Indicates that the vehicle's front fog lamps are illuminated.



ABS Light: Indicates that the Anti-lock Brake computer has set a code and needs professional diagnosis.



TPMS (Tire Pressure Monitoring System): Indicates the tire pressure monitoring system has found a tire with low air pressure or there may be a sensor malfunction. Check tire pressure. Some vehicles will allow manual reset of TPMS warning light and others will require professional diagnosis. Refer to owner's manual.



Airbag Fault: If this light stays illuminated after starting it indicates that the vehicle has found a fault in the airbag system and the computer has set a code. Professional repair of the supplemental restraint system is highly recommended.



Service Vehicle Soon: Typically indicates a lighting or other electrical problem that is controlled by the BCM (body control module). Check all lights, head lights, turn signals, brake lights, and hazard lights. This symbol may also be used to warn driver of a traction control problem, or a communication problem between modules.



Door Ajar: Indicates that a door (including hood and trunk) is not closed. Open and close all doors, including hood and trunk. If vehicle is left in this condition overnight it can drain the battery.



Washer Fluid Reminder: Indicates washer fluid is low. Fill washer fluid reservoir. The cap has a symbol that looks like a windshield. Some vehicles have separate reservoirs for front and rear window washers.



Brake System: Indicates one of three possible conditions: parking brake is on; problem with the braking system/brake fluid is low, or ABS problem. Check brake fluid and make sure the parking brake is fully released. If the problem is in the ABS system, it may need a professional diagnosis.



Oil Change Reminder: Indicates that oil life has expired. This is monitored by the ECM; the interval can be mileage or a combination of readings taken by the ECM. The reset procedure is listed in the owner's manual. Some vehicles require the use of special tools to reset the light.



Traction Control or ESP: Illuminates when the vehicle's traction control/anti-skid or electronic stability system is in use. Usually an indicator that conditions are slippery.



Security Alert: If the symbol lights momentarily it may mean that the ignition switch is locked and will need the proper transponder-equipped key to re-start. If the symbol is visible when the vehicle is on, then it typically indicates a malfunction in the security system.



Gas Cap: The check gas cap light indicates that the gas cap is not tightened properly. If not addressed, quite often the Check Engine Light will also illuminate.



Lamp Out: Indicates that there is an exterior light on the vehicle that is not functioning properly.



ESP Fault: Indicates that there is a problem with the vehicle's traction control/anti-skid or electronic stability system.



Cruise Control: Indicates that cruise control is set during driving.



Glow Plug (Diesel): On diesel vehicles this light indicates that the engine's glow plugs are warming up and the engine should not be started until this light goes out.



DPF Light (Diesel): The diesel exhaust particulate filter has failed its test and needs to be serviced.



DEF Light (Diesel): The diesel exhaust fluid reservoir is low on fluid.