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MAINTENANCE MATTERS
Cold Weather Coach Operation

With the cold weather of winter upon us, it's time remember what climate extremes can do to a coach — and what you can do to make sure that your coach is ready to weather the worst. The major areas of concern should be the electrical, powertrain and HVAC systems.

Electrical

The electrical system is probably the most overlooked part in cold weather. Here's a fact: As the temperature drops, so does the battery's capacity to produce current; at minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit, even a good battery may only be able to produce 10 percent of its total capacity. Prior to cold-weather operation, it is very important to verify the state of your batteries. Verify the electrolyte levels and strength, and load test the batteries with a quality battery tester or carbon pile. Replace any battery that is minimal during testing (remember that you're testing it in the warmth and it will degrade as the temperature drops further). Verify and clean the battery posts and battery post connectors.

Always important but often overlooked are the subsequent connections: battery switch ground stud in the battery compartment; the power block stud and ground studs in the engine compartment; the ground and power connections at the starter; and the ground and power terminals at the alternator. These also need to be verified and cleaned. Check the cables' condition: Are they corroded, and are the covers or sheathing intact? Replace any cables that look questionable as they will restrict current flow.

Test the battery equalizer per the manufacturer's instructions; be sure to also verify the function of the battery light at the telltales. Be sure to clean the cables and connections, verifying the unit's visible condition.

Powertrain

Double-check the freeze protection of your coolant to be sure it is of the appropriate strength: The proper mix is generally 50/50. Be sure to use the proper coolant for your coaches' engine; there are coolants specifically designed for the heavy-duty diesel market and they are the only ones you should use. Check your engine manufacturer's maintenance manual for the proper type of coolant.

Replace engine oils more often as coach will idle much more than normal. Verify transmission oil and engine oil and coolant levels several times a day. Repair any visible signs of leaks as soon as possible. Backwash radiator and charge air cooler often to prevent damage to cooling system. Verify all powertrain oil and coolant lines and connections during driver's daily inspection for leaks, damage and condition.

HVAC

Drivers should verify the function and controls of the HVAC system during their daily pre-trip inspection. Does it properly control the temperature? Can it control fan speed main and defroster? Inspect the air filters daily and clean or replace every 30 days if they are of the replaceable style. Consider overhauling your main water valve once a year as part of a preventative maintenance program. Install a new nozzle and clean the burner chamber on your auxiliary heater on yearly basis as a part of a preventative maintenance program.

The Human Element

As part of preparing for the winter season, be sure to give your drivers a pep talk. Remind them to slow down, leave more distance between vehicles and brake sooner. Remember to take care of your MCI coach, and it will take care of you — and your passengers. And remember that better weather is only a couple of months away.

The FYI from MCI editorial staff values your feedback. Please e-mail any suggestions, comments, or ideas for future articles to fyi@mcicoach.com.