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The triggering of a smoke detector alarm can save lives. Especially when asleep at night, people are frequently helpless against the outbreak of a fire in the home. "Studies show that the human sense of smell is switched off during sleep. This means that people won't wake up when the smell of burning starts to spread throughout the home," says Lars Inderthal, fire protection expert at the technical services organization DEKRA.

#### **Private leasing always preferred: prepare the return well**

More and more motorists are opting for leasing as an alternative to taking out a loan to finance their vehicle. And these days leasing is by no means the sole preserve of companies; the percentage of private leasing agreements shot up to a record high of 54 percent in 2020. However, "keep your wits about you" is the general rule for lessees when they are due to hand back their vehicle, usually after about three years.

#### **Getting through the cold winter days: winter cycling is all the rage**

The e-bike boom continues unabated. Around nine million e-bikes found their way on to Germany's roads by the end of 2021. And increasing numbers of cyclists are getting their bike out of the cellar in winter, too. That does the climate a good turn, keeps the owner fit and is currently all the rage. However, DEKRA cycling expert Jochen Hof has a few tips on what cyclists need to look out for during their winter cycling tours.

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*Work safety deficits: the hazard evaluation frequently lacking*

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## Smoke detectors: mandatory for all homes

Fire protection: check smoke detectors monthly

### The life-saving beepers

The triggering of a smoke detector alarm can save lives. Especially whilst asleep at night, people are frequently helpless against the outbreak of a fire in the home. “Studies show that the human sense of smell is switched off during sleep. This means that people will not wake up when the smell of burning starts to spread throughout the home,” says Lars Inderthal, fire protection expert at the technical services organization DEKRA. Highly toxic carbon monoxide (CO) can incapacitate anybody who simply breathes in just a few gulps of the fatal gas. And it is not without good reason that 70 percent of all fire victim cases occur during the night.

The expert stresses that “it is essential that smoke detectors are installed in bedrooms, children’s rooms and hallways. This has been mandatory for some years now.” Costing between 20 and 30 euros, the devices emit a piercing alarm when they are set off by smoke and warn either the sleeper or people in neighboring rooms. However, to ensure constant protection, a monthly check should be made to see if the warning detectors still function reliably.

If the smoke detector emits a tone when the control button is pressed, it means that the device is functioning correctly. If not, the battery or the device needs to be replaced immediately. The owner of a flat or house is responsible for the installation of a smoke detector, but keeping the device functioning is down to the tenant. If the smoke detector fails to function as it should, the landlord is to be informed as soon as possible. When purchasing a smoke detector, look out for the “Q label”. These devices do not require battery replacement and they lead to fewer false alarms than is the case with cheaper devices.

Because smoke rises, smoke detectors should be installed as close as possible to the ceiling. Inderthal urgently advises against installing a smoke detector in the stairwell of a block of flats as this can trigger false reactions. For instance, if a fire breaks out in another flat and the stairwell is already full of smoke, taking flight via the stairwell would end in disaster. In this event it would be safer to stay in your own flat, keep the doors close, seal up gaps and wait until the fire services arrived.”

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## Leasing returns: signs of wear or a fault?

### Private leasing increasingly popular

#### **Prepare the return well**

More and more motorists are opting for leasing as an alternative to taking out a loan to finance their vehicle. These days leasing is by no means the sole preserve of companies and the online platform Leasingmarkt.de has reported that the percentage of private leasing agreements shot up to a record 54 percent in 2020. However, “keep your wits about you” is the general rule for lessees when they are due to hand back their vehicle, usually after about three years.

The used car experts at DEKRA recommend taking some time to prepare the handover properly. For example, the lessee can expect deductions if the documentation or vehicle accessories are incomplete. Examples for the latter are if the second key, service manual or the operating instructions are missing, or the navigation DVD, the radio code card or the key to the tow hitch have been misplaced.

Michael Tziatzios is a used car expert at DEKRA and says “we recommend using a checklist to tick off the presence of these parts a few weeks before the handover date.” It would also be a good idea to take advantage of the handover check offered by some leasing companies about two months before the end of the leasing agreement. Tziatzios says “this means you still have time to complete the documentation or react to anomalies.”

A sticking point is also frequently the question of how minor scratches and dents on a vehicle are to be evaluated, i.e. signs of wear that are usually unavoidable on a vehicle that has done tens of thousands of kilometers. Is a mark the usual, age-related sign of age, a fault, or perhaps even damage? The difference is important because it translates into money. A sign of wear is accepted by the leasing company, damage, however, lowers the value of the vehicle. Slight scratches on the surface or abraded paint on the edges of doors, for example, can be tolerated at the handover, but large scratches, scratched mirrors or broken trim lead to deductions.

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## On winter roads: adapt your driving style

### Safely negotiating the winter roads

#### **Icy roads calls for sensitivity**

People travelling on winter roads and not wishing to have their vehicle turn into a sledge not only need a vehicle equipped for winter but also a large portion of composure and a suitable driving style. DEKRA accident expert Thomas Gut warns readers that “the road and weather conditions can change from one moment to the next. Always be aware of what is possible in the current situation and do not take any risks. Use your gas and brake pedals sparingly and maintain enough distance to vehicles ahead.”

“The outside temperature falling to below four degrees is a sign that it is essential to exercise extra caution. This is because it is now that the first icy patches can begin to appear.” Particularly susceptible to ice are bridges, cold woodland, but also draughty hilltops and plains. “Don’t take speed restrictions lightly and pay attention to the snowflake traffic symbol which warns of sudden ice formation,” says the expert.

If the roads are icy or completely covered in snow, sensitivity is called for. This applies to acceleration as well as braking and steering. Go easy on the gas and drive at low revs, so that the wheels will not spin so easily. Abrupt maneuvering, for example, when braking or turning can easily turn the vehicle into a sledge. Nevertheless, in emergency situations apply the brake liberally on vehicles fitted with ABS in order to prevent the vehicle from breaking away uncontrollably.

On slippery roads, drivers also need to be fully focused. “Don’t allow yourself to be distracted, either by your cell phone or your navigation system,” Gut warns. “If you are distracted for just two seconds at 50 km/h, you will cover around 28 meters in blind flight. The risk of an accident increases enormously when driving on slippery road surfaces.” If the weather forecast reports slippery roads, it is also advisable to factor in more time for your car trips. “Impatience, hectic and brash driving are the bitter enemies of safe driving, especially in winter,” warns the accident expert. If the weather forecast is really bad, it might sometimes be a good idea to switch to taking a bus or the train. DEKRA Info



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## In winter: safer cycling wearing a high-visibility vest

### With the e-bike through the white season

## Winter biking is all the rage

The e-bike boom continues unabated. Some nine million electric bicycles found their way on to Germany's roads by the end of 2021. And increasing numbers of cyclists are getting their bike out of the cellar in winter, too. That does the climate a good turn, keeps the owner fit and is currently all the rage. However, DEKRA cycling expert Jochen Hof has a few tips on what cyclists need to look out for during their cycling tours in winter conditions.

Hof says "if you can trust yourself on a normal bike in winter then there is no reason why you should not be able to ride an e-bike in winter." However, it would be advisable to adapt your biking style on wet, dirty or icy paths and roads. This means: less of a jaunty start, reducing speed in curves, cautious cycling, looking out for slippery leaves and icy patches (black ice on bridges) and more cautious braking than on dry road surfaces. On account of the greater danger of falling off, a helmet is highly recommended. Reflective clothing, neon helmet caps, bags or high-visibility vests provide more safety, above all in poor visibility.

"Beginners would be well advised to work up to handling more slippery surfaces by practising when the first snowflakes fall. In snow it can also help to set the saddle somewhat lower so that you can more easily catch yourself with your feet if the cycle slips away," says the expert. "Important in winter are tires with sufficient tread depth. The air pressure can be reduced to a minimum to help give the tires more grip. This increases the tire contact surface and provides more grip on slippery surfaces. Spikes are only permissible for normal e-bikes up to 25 km/h.

„The other bike systems must also be in order so that you can stay safe on the electric bicycle during your two-wheeler winter tour. All the lights must be functioning and it is recommended to have a bright LED headlight," says Hof. Good braking can be ensured by regularly cleaning the rims as well as checking the brake lines and linings. "Tighten the connections of wheels and handlebars. This prevents falls, and naturally a smooth ride is ensured by cleaning and lubricating the chain and gears."

The batteries are in principle configured for winter operation. Nevertheless, it is recommended to remove the energy bar if the e-bike is to be left out overnight in the icy cold. “Warning: do not charge the battery in a cold state, but only when it has warmed up to room temperature and only take it out into the cold just before starting off,” stresses Hof. It is sensible to have a thermo-protection hood as this makes the battery less susceptible to the cold airflow.

If the electric bicycle is to be put into hibernation for the winter, the battery should never be left connected to the charger for any lengthy period of time. For longer breaks, Bosch recommends a charging state of between 20 and 60 percent. This is the case if two or three light diodes are lit when the battery is tested. This, as well as the room temperature of between 10 and 20 degrees Celsius, has a positive effect on the service life. The opposite is true of temperatures below minus 10 degrees and a lengthy storage period in a completely empty or almost empty state. People wishing to do more can store the batteries in special storage boxes for the winter. DEKRA Info



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### **Work safety deficits: the hazard evaluation frequently lacking**

Many companies ignore the statutory duty to evaluate psychological hazards for their employees. According to a DEKRA survey, only about a third of employees (31 percent) report of psychological hazard evaluation in their company. 53 percent of companies admitted as such, while 15 percent were not sure. The fact that psychological hazards are ignored by most employees is an alarm signal from a technical viewpoint,” says Dr. Karin Müller, Head of the People and Health Division of DEKRA. “For companies that fulfill this statutory duty it is only the first step towards a sustainable organization that really looks after its employees.” Companies that place a focus on the well-being of their employees, had a demonstrably healthier, more satisfied, more motivated and thus better performing workforce. DEKRA Info