

Driver Safety — Car Batteries

It is common practice to jump-start a car. The process is very simple, and most motorists are able to perform it easily. It can prove a very useful skill for those in need, but there is a little-known explosion hazard associated with this procedure that can do a great deal of damage to both cars and bodies.

Battery explosions are particularly dangerous because they shower the surrounding area with sulfuric acid. To avoid these explosions, take the following precautions:

- Don't smoke when working near your car's battery.
- Do nothing that would make a spark near your car's battery. A favorite test of many motorists is to hook the two cables to the booster battery and then touch the other ends of the cables together. If they see a spark, then they are assured that there is current. If the hydrogen gas in or over your battery contacts that spark, it can explode.
- The last cable connection should not be attached to the grounded terminal of the dead battery. Attach the last cable clamp to the engine block, generator/alternator bracket or any other ground at least a foot from the dead battery. The reasoning is sound: This last connection will complete the electrical circuit and when any circuit is closed there is potential for sparks.
- Remove the vent caps on both batteries and inspect to see that the fluid is at the proper level before connecting the cables. Leaving the battery vent caps off during the charging cycle enables the generated gases to escape more readily.

Remember that the last two connections in the jumping procedure should be to hook the grounded terminal of the booster battery to a ground at least a foot from the dead battery. If you cannot tell which terminals are grounded and which are not, it is advisable to have someone who can tell make the connections.



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