



SEATTLE@HOME

October 10, 2008

Get Organized: Hit the brakes on clutter

LAURA LEIST

HAVE YOU EVER walked through a parking lot and noticed a car or two that could benefit from a bit of organization and maybe a trash can?

Or maybe you've wanted to go somewhere with one of your friends and they asked if you could take your car, because theirs has too much stuff in it and it would take too long to clear out?

I'm sure we all can relate to needing to corral the car clutter from time to time ... including myself. I am guilty of leaving my empty Diet Coke cans and half-full water bottles in my car, along with a variety of papers and CDs from projects I have been out working on.

If I don't stay on top of it every couple of days, it really could add up! I use several of the products I recommend in this article to help me keep our cars organized. Plus, with so many of them available online, you can save time and gas and have them delivered to your door.

But before we dive into my recommended list of products, let's think of your car in terms of zones. Each car can be divided into three zones. Considering who drives the car most often and who is a regular passenger also will help you decide how to best organize your car.

Determining the zones in your car and organizing the contents shouldn't take much time. In fact, you probably can accomplish this in just an hour or two -- a short time frame compared to many organizing projects.

Driver/Passenger Zone

Whether you use your car as an office on wheels, or to chauffeur the kids, or a combination of the two, here are some ideas to help control the clutter that you might find in the Driver/Passenger Zone.

- Clean out the trash often and have an easily accessible trash can that all can access. Sometimes, depending on the size of the car, you may want to use two. I like the auto floor litterbag from Organize.com that retails for \$13.99.
- If you're always on the go and need to carry around files and a laptop, you may want to invest in a portable office organizer that can make clearing the front seat a snap. The Auto Exec Passenger from Organize.com retails for \$132.99, but there are many other models to suit your specific needs.

The reason I like this one is because there are 10 storage compartments and it even has a place to store a removable 150-watt inverter that has a single 110 Volt AC outlet, USB port and six-foot extension that provides power for you while you're on the go. Add the strap and you're ready to go from your car to the office.

- In case of an emergency, a Life Hammer kept in your glove box can help you get out of your car in the event of an emergency. The razor blade can cut away a seatbelt if you become trapped and the double-tipped hammer will break windows. Find it from containerstore.com for \$14.99.
- How do you easily store and access you phone, PDA, glasses, CDs, magazines and more? Better than using the passenger seat, use The Swing Away Driver Organizer to store these small,

but needed items. If you need to use the passenger seat, just swing the organizer to the back seat and the seat is cleared. No more having to gather up everything on the seat. Just \$10.99 at Organize.com.

- Receipts ... what do you do with them? Having a place to keep them together and access them is simple when you use a receipt wallet that can be strapped on a heater vent in the car. This little wallet also is handy for spare change. Find this at CaseLogic.com for \$5.49.

Kid Zone

The Kid Zone is probably one of the more challenging areas to keep organized ... and clean. Providing your children with the right tools to help them keep their area organized will be a big help -- otherwise, you never know where stuff may land!

- To assist with corralling the "entertainment" activities, the Car Entertainment Organizer straps to the back of the seat and helps you and the kids stay organized and keep stuff off the floor and seats. You can store CDs, books, games on CDs and other small toys utilizing the various pockets, and there even is a place for tissues within quick reach for the kids. Find it for \$13.99 at Organize.com.

- When I was a kid, my mom always told us to keep our feet off the back of the seat. If only she had the Kid's Back Seat Protector, maybe I could have put my feet on the seat! It helps to keep the back of the seat from becoming a mural with markers and has a place to store a few books to boot. Only \$10.49 from CaseLogic.com.

- I know the kids may not be doing the grocery shopping, but if the trunk is full or you just want to toss a couple of bags of groceries in the back seat, why not keep them from spilling on the floor by using some Car Seat Hooks. Just \$3.99 from Organize.com will hold at least two cloth bags with handles. They also are great for holding your purse, kids' backpacks or even a bag of toys that can be kept within reach.

Trunk Zone

The Trunk Zone easily can become a place where things are dumped. Utilizing a few products can help keep the trunk organized and easy to find things.

- One of my favorites is the Modular Hauler System, found at The Container Store (containerstore.com) for \$69.99 The three colored cases are the perfect solution for hauling kids' stuff or sporting gear. Just assign a color to each child so you can organize by person. You also could assign one of the compartments to emergency supplies for your car, such as an extra blanket, water and a few snacks.

- How many times do you find yourself having to haul stuff from one place to the next and a shopping bag or box just won't do? I use solid Folding Crates often to move stuff from one place to the next. I like that they collapse, making storage easy when I remove them from my trunk. You also could leave them in your trunk to help contain sports gear, groceries or returns you've been meaning to take back to the store. The lid on top helps conceal the contents. At containerstore.com for \$21.99.

Laura Leist is president and founder of locally-based Eliminate Chaos LLC (eliminatechaos.com). Her latest book is "Eliminate Chaos: The 10-Step Process to Organize Your Home & Life." She can be reached at laura@eliminatechaos.com.