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Oh, Canada

Winter tire law prompts shortages here

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Friday, December 26, 2008

A new Quebec law requiring all vehicles to use winter tires is causing local shortages.

As a safety precaution, the law states that between Dec. 15 and March 15, all vehicles in Quebec must be equipped with winter tires, which provide better traction and control in sub-zero temperatures and on icy, snowy roads. Violation of the law can result in fines between \$200 and \$300.

With the Quebec law in effect, some Valley stores are now out of certain sizes of snow tires, forcing customers to shop elsewhere, wait an unusual amount of time for their choices or shop next year.

"The problem with snow tires is they're not all-season tires made for the mass market," said Scott MacPhail, vice president in retail sales for Town Fair Tire. "It's not a commodity item and that's why there would be a shortage."

Tire manufacturers have to retool factories once a year to make the snow tires. Distributors place winter tire orders in the spring and summer and receive the shipments in the fall. Winter-tire sales need to be anticipated six months before the tires are shipped to Town Fair Tire, which places orders in April.

MacPhail said it is hard to predict how much to order, as demand varies every year.

"It's a difficult business, you never seem to have enough," MacPhail said. "But so far we still have a good supply for the vast majority of sizes."

On the contrary, Duffy Tire Center on Bridge Street in Northampton, which receives about 100 snow tires each year, is now wiped out of certain sizes. Customers won't be able to get those sizes until next year, according to owner James Duffy.

Employees at Pete's Tire Barn on North King Street in Northampton are telling customers they'll have to wait - as it's going to be a tough year to buy snow tires because manufacturers have sent the bulk of them to Canada.

The store is waiting on about 1,500 tires, according to management, as model tires for Honda, Toyota Matrix and Pontiac Vibe vehicles (to name a few) are out and top-of-the-line snow tires are even more scarce.

Pete's Tire Barn usually has 4,000 snow tires in stock with leftovers each year. But this year, only 1,500 were shipped in the fall. To help remedy the tire shortfall, Firestone Complete Auto Care delivers loads of 200 to 300 tires to Pete's stores every other day.

Meanwhile, Town Fair Tire shipped at least 200 winter tires to small, independent garages in the Canadian border area in Vermont, according to MacPhail. Town Fair Tire stores in Northampton, Manchester, N.H., and on the coast of Maine are the closest stores to Canada, but no shortages have been reported there, MacPhail said. Vehicles in need of snow tires are often rear-wheel drive cars like BMWs and Mercedes, which are "notoriously" worse in the snow, MacPhail said. Snow tires



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are also increasingly sought at Monro Muffler Brake and Service in Hadley, which received 120 of them in October. Store Manager Melanie Arkoette said snow tires are still in stock at the store "for the most part."

"None have run out that I'm aware of yet," Arkoette said.

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