



C.A.T. AMERICA USDOT 247969

Defensive Driving Tips

Use your Safety Belt

In a commercial motor vehicle, safety belt use is required by law. A properly adjusted safety belt has the lap belt positioned low and tight across the hips, not the stomach. If the safety belt includes a shoulder belt, it should be placed over the shoulder, not under the arm or behind the occupant. A lap belt and shoulder belt, properly used, will minimize most injuries due to a crash.

Vehicle Care

Defensive driving starts with proper vehicle maintenance. The following items should be checked regularly as part of your pre trip, enroute and post trip inspections:

- Brakes
- Belts (fan, alternator and A/C)
- Tires and tire pressure
- Engine fluids (motor oil, coolant, power steering)
- Lights (tractor & trailer)
- Wiper blades
- Windshield and window cleanliness

The inside of the truck should be well maintained, too. All items should be secured during the trip so they don't become a projectile during a sudden maneuver.

Plan Your Route

Before leaving on your trip, know the route you are going to take. Keep a current map in the truck for reference. If you have to refer to a map, pull off the road to a safe area, such as a rest stop or parking lot. If you are lost, stay in control of your emotions.

Cell Phones

Cell phones are very popular and many people now own one. Research indicates that the use of cell phones while operating a vehicle is a safety hazard. Some research indicates a driver's reaction time is slowed by three to four times while using a cell phone. The best and safest situation is to be stopped when using the phone or your satellite.

Voice mail is a good option to ask for on your phone for receiving phone calls. It is important to remember that driving safely is your main priority.

Driver Conditions

Being sleepy is dangerous when you are behind the wheel. Sleepiness slows reaction time, decreases awareness and impairs judgment. The following are some danger signs for drowsy drivers:

- Your eyes close or go out of focus by themselves.
- You have trouble keeping your head up.
- You can't stop yawning.

You have wandering, disconnected thoughts.
You don't remember driving the last few miles.
You missed your exit.
You keep driving out of your lane.
Your speed becomes variable.

Tips for staying awake:

Get plenty of rest.
Avoid driving at night when possible.
Adjust your vehicle's environment to stay alert.
Watch your posture.
Take frequent breaks and exercise.
Stop for light meals and snacks.
Don't allow your eyes to become fatigued and hypnotized. Wear sunglasses in daylight to fight glare.
Break the monotony.
If all else fails, pull over to a safe and secure area and sleep.

Safe Following Distance

One way to practice safe driving is to allow plenty of space between you and the other vehicles.

Approaching Intersections

Most accidents occur at intersections, and within two to three seconds after the light changes. Follow these tips to avoid many intersection accidents:

As you approach any uncontrolled intersection, never assume the other driver is going to yield. Cover your brake with your right foot and prepare to stop.

If you are approaching an intersection where the light has been green for a while, cover your brake and prepare to stop.

If you are stopped at an intersection with a traffic light and it turns green, wait. Make sure the traffic has stopped. Never assume. Look left, right and back left before proceeding through the intersection.

Always look for pedestrians at intersections.

Braking Distance

Simply put, you cannot stop a tractor trailer on a dime! Braking distance is a factor of three components - perception time, reaction time and braking distance. In ideal circumstances, perception time is about one second and reaction time is three-fourths of a second. If you are tired, or distracted (i.e., using a cell phone), these times will increase. According to the theory of kinetic energy, a body at rest tends to stay at rest, and a body in motion tends to stay in motion. If you double your speed, the vehicle braking distance quadruples; and this is in ideal conditions!

Control Factor

Everyday you get behind the wheel, there are factors that are under your control and others that are not under your control.

Some factors not in your control include:

Weather
Other drivers
Friction
Energy of motion

Force of impact

Factors you can control include:

- Emotions - good and bad
- Vehicle condition
- Vehicle speed
- Position in traffic and space around vehicle
- Concentration on the driving task

Be aware of the factors that you cannot control and concentrate on those that you can.

Safe driving tips

Driving "defensively" just doesn't seem to cut it anymore. There are some measures you can take to ensure your safety. There's a lot to avoid out there, but you can steer clear of trouble by just relaxing and taking things easy.

This is meant mostly for highway gridlock, the most challenging and frustrating form of traffic. What you'll find is that the majority of other drivers out there are "brakers" - people who speed up to slowing traffic and have to hit their brakes.

A good way to ease traffic, both for yourself and other drivers, is to put a large gap in between your truck and the vehicle in front of you. It's a pretty basic rule of driving, but it's often forgotten among our hectic lifestyle. However, it's the one thing that can prevent an accident as effectively as anything else. The recommended space might be vehicle car length per 10 miles-an-hour. It's better to have at least double that, especially if you're traveling at 60 mph or faster. Just imagine the vehicle in front of you stopping instantly, as if it hit a brick wall. Would you collide into it, or would you be able to stop in time?

The biggest problem that arises from leaving a good-sized gap is other drivers riding too close behind you. Don't worry about them. Try to be courteous and get out of the fast lane if you're not keeping up.

If ever there is a conflict developing with another driver, let it go. Don't gesture back. Don't race or swerve or suddenly hit your brakes. It's not worth risking lives over a little road rage.

You'll find if you relax, leave a big gap in front of your vehicle and plan your maneuvers, you'll enjoy the smooth ride. You can often find "cushion zones" in the herds of vehicles flying down the freeway. If you keep your speed right -- not too slow and not too fast -- you can ride in these zones and have all three, four or six lanes to yourself. This is especially true for long road trips on the interstate.

When traffic is stop and go, try to get a large gap in front again and go slowly. By pacing yourself, you can roll through the stop-an-go pattern by just going slow. It can be much less aggravating. It also helps ease traffic as the vehicles behind you are not seeing brake lights or hitting their brakes as much. It's also easier on your vehicle and the environment.

Just remember that there are real people in the other vehicles, even though they might just seem like obstacles. By relaxing and respecting the rules of the road and not rushing yourself, the ride is much more enjoyable, no matter where you're going.

Please drive safely!

Andy Yoos
Safety Director