

Safe Driving

Every 10 minutes, someone in the United States dies as the result of a motor vehicle accident. During that same period, about 33 people are injured—about 2 million of these injuries each year are disabling. And more than one-third of job-related fatalities are the result of vehicle accidents.

To help keep yourself from becoming one of these dire statistics, let's review some of the techniques of safe driving—which includes maintaining as well as operating your vehicle in such a way as to avoid accidents in spite of adverse conditions and the incorrect actions of others.

Proper Vehicle Maintenance

This can go a long way toward reducing unnecessary vehicle accidents. The following items need to be checked frequently:

- Brakes: Check fluid regularly, check wear and adjust as needed.
- Tires: Maintain proper air pressure, rotate at regular intervals, check balancing and tread wear. Change at the first hint of trouble.
- Lights: Make sure all lights—front, rear, and side—are in working order. Keep them clean to maintain their brightness and visibility.
- Windshield wipers: Replace when streaking starts to occur.
- Horn: Repair immediately if a malfunction develops.
- Side and rearview mirrors: Keep clean and properly adjusted.
- Seat adjustments: Make sure the seat is adjusted to prevent fatigue or strain.

View the Road—Get the Whole Picture

Be alert while driving so you will be ready to react quickly. Know what to look for and where to look:

- When approaching entrances to shopping malls, drive-ins, restaurants, or filling stations, look for any movement that may mean a vehicle is pulling out into traffic.
- Watch for movement well back from the intersection on side roads and at cross streets, so that you can act defensively if necessary.
- On multilane roads notice the space between the tires of the vehicle in front of you and the lane marking nearest to the tire. If the gap starts to narrow, it could mean that the vehicle is drifting or about to change lanes.
- Watch for pedestrians, especially children and animals, and expect anything. Be ready to use your brakes.
- Watch in the rearview mirror for drivers behind you who might want to pass. Frequent checks will help you see someone pulling into the opposing lane. You will be aware of them even if they pull into your blind spot.
- Do not concentrate on one spot on the road. Scan back and forth, looking for any potential problems. Watch what's happening well out in front of your vehicle to detect problems sooner.
- Keep a safe distance behind the car in front of you. Add one more car length of space for each additional 10 miles per hour of speed.

Driving in Bad Weather or at Night

- Rain, snow, ice, fog, and dark increase the chances of an accident and so require extra caution and slower speeds.

Winter driving:

- Slow down on ice or snow. Braking distances on ice can increase from 4 to 10 times normal. Avoid slamming on the brakes; use an even, quick, pumping action for rear-wheel drive and slow, steady pressure for front-wheel drive.
- In case of a skid, turn the front wheels in the direction of the skid.
- When coming to an icy spot, slow down gradually to retain more control of your vehicle.
- Keep the windshield washer reservoir completely full.
- Completely clear both front and back windows of snow. A peephole is not enough.
- Make sure you have proper snow tires or all-weather radials in good condition.
- Give yourself extra time to get where you need to go.
- On bright days, wear a good pair of sunglasses or use the sun visor.

Night driving:

- Make sure mirrors, lights, and windshield are clean.
- Never wear sunglasses at night.
- Check to see if headlights are properly aimed.
- After dark, give your eyes a chance to adjust before starting to drive.
- Turn headlights on before dusk so other drivers can see your car.
- If lights from an oncoming car make it difficult to see the road, focus on the right edge of the pavement. The human eye takes seven seconds to recover from headlight glare.
- Reduce speed; you should be able to stop in the distance provided by your headlights.
- Rain and fog:
- Keep windshield wipers on. Make sure they are in good repair.
- Turn on the defroster and/or fan to cut condensation on the inside of the car windows.
- In fog, roll down the side window part way so you can hear better.
- Keep headlights on low beam.
- Slow down but keep moving. Don't stop unless you can get completely off the road.
- On wet pavement, apply brakes smoothly and evenly.

And Finally

Here are two precautions that will make major contributions to your safety no matter what the hour or the weather:

- DO NOT drink and drive. Alcohol dims alertness, impairing driving ability by about 30 percent after as few as two drinks. Don't ride with someone you believe is under the influence, either. Adopt the "designated driver" approach.
- Use your seat belt—and insist that passengers use theirs—even in vehicles equipped with air bags.