

# Driving Safety



# Defense Against Blind Spots

A key component of defensive driving is being aware of blind spots. Before hitting the road, ensure your mirrors are adjusted to provide a clear view of other vehicles or obstructions that may be out of sight.

Here are some things to look out for when taking to the road.

- Other vehicles like cars, motorcycles, bicycles, pedestrians and animals.
- Signals that warn of problems ahead.
- Signs that are giving directions.
- Construction workers, event workers or police officers directing traffic with signs or flags.

While it's important to check your blind spots before making a move, it's equally critical to ensure the path ahead is clear prior to taking your eyes off the road.

## USE ADVANCED SAFETY FEATURES

One way automakers are enhancing safety on the highway is including cutting-edge safety features that alert drivers to potential hazards. Blind-spot detection can be found in many new vehicles as a standard inclusion.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, sensors are used to monitor the



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sides of a vehicle for other cars approaching blind spots. Typically, vehicles with this feature will signal that changing lanes is unsafe by displaying a warning alert on or near the side mirrors. In addition to reducing lane-changing accidents, the Highway Loss Data Institute finds that equipped vehicles help lower insurance

claims covering damage to other automobiles.

## MORE AFFORDABLE SAFETY

If buying a newer vehicle with blind-spot detection doesn't fit your budget, consider using a low-cost solution to enhance your car's safety. Visit a local auto parts store or deal-

ership to inquire about installing convex mirrors that can be added to your existing rear-view side mirrors. Many can be easily fixed with an adhesive back to extend your view of what is happening behind you.

## RESPECT OTHERS' BLIND SPOTS

When driving, you're not

only responsible for your safety but also for other drivers. Take caution to avoid remaining in blind spots for extended periods to help reduce the risk of accidents. Be extra cautious by staying out of view when traveling near semi-trailers other large commercial vehicles, as their range of sight can be limited.



# What your Car Is Trying to Tell You

Driving a damaged vehicle can create dangerous situations during your daily commute. Worn tires, a compromised engine or a faulty braking system, can put you and others at risk when breaking down in the middle of traffic.

Fortunately, vehicles are manufactured to give you warning signs when something is wrong.

The most obvious way to know that a part or system requires attention is noticing warning lights on your vehicle's dashboard. Common alerts indicate that the engine needs service, a tire is a low, the car is overheating or your battery has an issue. While the issue may not always be critical, it's essential to visit your local repair shop so they can scan the codes with a computer and determine the light's significance.

Since diagnostic tools cannot discover all issues, it's important to understand a few ways a vehicle operates when service is necessary.

## **SQUEAKING OR GRINDING BRAKES**

An efficient braking system is crucial. The ability to stop in response to a driver ahead of you can significantly limit



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the risk of causing an accident.

While many newer vehicles use a brake pad wear sensor to warn a driver that a replacement is needed, older cars show distress differently.

The National Auto Parts Association suggests that if you hear a squealing noise when applying the brakes, it's likely that pad is worn to its wear indicator and service is

due. If you forego a replacement, the friction may become low enough to dig into the rotor, causing the system to grind and shake. Not only will degraded discs cause more expensive repairs, but your safety can be severely compromised as the vehicle's stop time is limited.

## **BELT ISSUES**

Modern vehicles rely on a

single or a system of serpentine belts to operate pulley-driven components under the hood. Parts like the water pump, alternator and air conditioning compressor all rely on the belt to perform correctly. If a belt snaps due to wear, you may find yourself facing a breakdown far from home.

A visual way you can inspect this part is by analyz-

ing it for signs of fraying, cracks or splits. Many times, the belt or tensioner system will create a squealing noise when it requires attention. If you plan a DIY replacement, look under the hood for a belt-routing diagram to ensure it is installed correctly.

For more peace of mind, an authorized repair service can efficiently swap the belts safely.



# Stay Safe on the Interstate

Americans all over the country rely on an intricate maze of interstate roadways. Whether you're on these fast-paced roads for long-distance travel or merely traveling to work, driving safety should be your number one priority.

A recent report from the Federal Communications Commission showed that about 660,000 Americans use their phones while operating their vehicles. As a direct effect, about nine citizens lose their lives each day due to accidents caused by distracted driving. It's critical to avoid using your phone on any American highway, but the high speed limits allowed on interstates can cause more disastrous accidents.



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## MERGE SAFELY

Entering the interstate during rush hour can be one of the most stressful actions you make as a driver. Ensuring the lane is free of traffic before you make a move means you must take your eyes away from the view ahead. It's critical to analyze the flow of vehicles as you accelerate onto the merge ramp.

Try to identify a gap that you can enter safely and

adjust your speed accordingly. Once you are on the freeway, finding a comfortable following distance from other vehicles can be difficult. If you must make a lane change, be sure to check your blind spots first.

## FOLLOW AT A SAFE DISTANCE

The National Safety Council recommends that drivers fol-

low the three-second rule when following other vehicles. Essentially, this leaves operators with ample time to react to potential hazards like abrupt stops from the car ahead. Finding the right distance is simple.

- Find a starting point for your distance measurements, like a road sign, tree or another notable marker.
- When the vehicle you're

following hits the designated location, count how long it takes you to reach the same destination.

- Adjust your speed accordingly to leave more space, or if you have room, to follow more closely.

## STAY IN YOUR LANE

Most states post signs asking drivers to stay on the right side of the highway unless you

must make a lane change. The left lane is typically designated for faster-moving traffic to pass slower vehicles.

When traveling slowly in the passing lane, the traffic behind you may build and become a safety hazard. Also, if an emergency vehicle requires an open lane to tend to a situation, slow-moving traffic can limit their response time.



# Driving in Construction Zones

Warmer weather means more highway crews are out to improve the conditions of the roadways for American drivers.

While entering their workspace may seem like an inconvenience as it causes delays, driving through a construction zone must be performed with extreme caution.

Staying safe in a work zone requires the attention and defensive driving measures from everyone on the road. Respect posted speed limits to avoid expensive reprimands from highway police officers and ensure workers remain safe while performing their jobs.

If you plan on traveling this year for vacation, learn the importance and tips for safer driving in construction zones from the United States Department of Transportation.



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## WORK ZONE

### ACCIDENT STATISTICS

The Federal Highway Administration reveals these startling statistics regarding accidents in construction zones.

- In the past five years, 4,400 people died and 200,000 were injured in work zone crashes.
- Most work zone fatalities involve working-age adults.
- Fatal construction zone

crashes occur most often in summer and fall.

- Rear-end crashes are the most common type of accidents in work zones.
- Most fatal crashes occurred on roads with speed limits higher than 50 mph.

### PAY ATTENTION AND PLAN AHEAD

If you will be making a

long-distance drive, it's essential to plan by analyzing your navigation route for ongoing construction projects. If possible, find an alternate way to lessen your chances of becoming stopped in slow-moving traffic and adding to the hazards faced by highway workers. If you must travel through a work zone, pay attention to the

flagger or posted signs that display instructions. Many times, a lane may be closed and requires that all drivers must stay in a single row.

### OBEY THE SPEED LIMIT

Work zone speed limits are in place to protect workers and vehicle operators. Make sure to watch for signs that ask you to slow down ahead

of entering the construction project. Most highway restrictions will allow drivers time to enter the designated space and preferred speed before they reach the actual work zone.

Of course, use discretion when driving through zones with active workers as you may have to drive slower than the signs are demanding.



# Dealing with Road Rage

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration first began using the term aggressive driving during the 1990s. It's used to describe road rage, which categorizes actions like following too closely, excessive speeds, weaving through traffic and running through stop signs or red lights.

Road rage amongst drivers often leads to angry and violent confrontations. A 2009 study by the American Automobile Association shows that between 2003 and 2007, aggressive driving had a role in 56% of fatal crashes, with excessive speed being the leading factor. When traveling American roadways, it's critical to remain calm and attentive as some drivers may not be cautious.

## FACTORS FOR ROAD RAGE

According to the American Psychological Association, research shows that young males are the most likely to perpetrate road rage. Numerous studies link aggressive driving techniques to those with high life stress and



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displaced anger. Here are some findings connected to high-anger drivers and their performance behind the wheel.

- They are more likely to drive 10 to 20 mph over the speed limit.
- They had twice as many car accidents in driving simulations.
- They experience more trait

anger, anxiety and impulsiveness than those who lead less stressful lives.

- They are more likely to insult other drivers or express disbelief about the way others drive.

While it's challenging to gauge another driver's intentions, avoiding aggressive driving yourself is an efficient solution to avoid road rage.

## AVOIDING AGGRESSIVE DRIVERS

If you find yourself faced with a situation where you must defend your vehicle from an aggressive driver, there are several ways to inhibit the chances of it escalating.

First, try to avoid someone displaying hazardous driving. Distance yourself by slowing down, pulling off the highway

to give them space while you reenter or turn down another street. It can be difficult to ignore someone who is acting aggressively toward you, but it's a good idea to talk yourself out of responding. Rather than retaliating against the threat of road rage, have an internal conversation that reinforces your decision not to participate in dangerous driving behaviors.



# Safely Travel Long Distances

It can be tempting to make a long drive without taking breaks to reach your destination quickly.

However, if you're tired behind the wheel, you may be putting yours and the life of others at risk. Consider planning to take a break or share the responsibility of driving with passengers when making road trips.

According to research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2014, nearly 150,000 adults in 19 states admitted to falling asleep at the wheel within the past 30 days. In 2017, the National Highway Safety Traffic Administration reported that there were more than 795 fatalities in motor vehicle crashes caused by drowsy driving.

## SIGNS THAT YOU'RE SLEEPY

It's not always easy to separate boredom in the car from when you're becoming sleepy. Consider these factors that the Sleep Foundation suggests to determine if you should pull over to rest.

- Heavy eyelids, difficulty focusing and frequent blinking.
- Wandering thoughts or daydreaming.
- Trouble remembering the last few miles driven or missing traffic signs.
- Drifting from your lane or finding it challenging to keep your head up.
- Feeling restless or irritable.



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If you find yourself struggling to maintain your focus on the road, it is imperative to find a rest area or hand the keys to someone else in the vehicle.

## HOW TO AVOID DROWSINESS

Before planning to take a long-distance trip, you should

prepare your body for the long drive ahead. Make sure to get plenty of sleep the previous night and fully wake up before beginning your travels.

You also can increase your alertness by packing along drinks with caffeine like coffee or sports drinks, but limit your intake to safe levels to avoid becoming irritable. The Sleep

Foundation also suggests restricting your driving time between midnight and 6 a.m. as our body's biological rhythm may make it difficult to remain awake.

## FINDING PLACES TO SLEEP

Try to take breaks for rest as a part of the long-distance

adventure. If the weather is comfortable, pack your gear and find a campsite along the way. Spending the night outdoors can create a wholesome bond with nature and help you feel refreshed for the next portion of your trip. Whether you prefer to camp or find a hotel, it's a good idea to make a reservation before your journey.

# Avoid Marijuana Use While Driving

As of 2020, the National Conference of State Legislatures recognizes 10 individual states where the use of recreational marijuana is legal. With the uptick in legality, there is growing concern about the safety of the highways and impaired drivers.

According to the National Highway Traffic Administration, 12.6% of weekend nighttime drivers from 2013 to 2014 tested positive for having tetrahydrocannabinol in their system, compared to just 8.6% in 2007. THC is the marijuana component that provides psychological effects and may cause significant impairment when operating a motor vehicle. Frighteningly, the Highway Loss Data Institute reports that automobile crashes are up 6% in locations where marijuana is recreationally legal.

You can do your part to protect yourself and others on the road by avoiding usage before you get behind the wheel.

## CAN YOU GET A DUI?

Driving impaired under any substance is illegal and can result in expensive fines and the loss of your driver's license. While the signs of alcohol use may be more evident for police officers to detect, the Reason Foundation says law enforcement officials use in-depth measures to take those under the influence of THC off the road. Commonly, officers will analyze a person's pupils for

signs of impairment before pursuing more technical testing to discover the amount of the substance in a driver's system.

## DOES MARIJUANA AFFECT DRIVING PERFORMANCE?

Yes, THC interferes with the brain's ability to function correctly. It effectively affects the part of the brain that controls our body's movements, balance, coordination, memory and judgment. Here are some other reasons to avoid using marijuana before driving, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- It can slow your reaction time and negatively impact decision-making.
- It impairs coordination, distorts perceptions, leads to memory loss and makes problem-solving challenging.
- The risk of driving while using marijuana in combination with alcohol shows to be greater than that for either by itself.

Do yourself and others on the roads a favor by only partaking in marijuana consumption when you're settled in at home without the need to drive.

