

SAFETY MATTERS

CRASH COURSE ON DEFENSIVE DRIVING

In today's fast paced world, defensive driving is more important than ever. Defensive driving means that you are able to stay out of trouble despite road conditions, the weather, and most important other drivers' behavior.

Defensive driving starts with a vehicle that's in safe running order. Before you take to the road, check all lights, fluids, belts, as well as tire pressure and wear. Also, check your own condition. If you are tired, angry, or stressed out, your reactions and patience may not be as good as they normally are. Also, buckle up. It's the law in most states, and it doubles your chance of survival in a serious crash.

The cornerstone of defensive driving is the two-second rule. This rule gives you the space and time you need to react to emergencies. When the car in front of you passes a fixed object, start counting... if you get to the object before you reach two, you're too close. In less than perfect travel conditions add another second.

Check for blind spots. Your blind spots include the areas to the right and left rear of your vehicle that you can't see with your mirrors. It's critical to check them before you change lanes.

Know proper passing techniques:

- Maintain proper following distance; turn on appropriate signal; look ahead and behind; and check blind spots.
- Move left into passing lane; increase speed; sound horn; move ahead of the other vehicle; signal right; and check your blind spot.
- Complete the pass. Look in your mirror; when you can see pavement in front of the car you are passing move to the right. Then turn off your signal and maintain proper speed.

Avoid head on collisions:

- Read the road ahead. Watch for oncoming traffic and suspicious movement.
- Drive to the right. If there is an oncoming car in your lane, ease over to the side of the road. Look for an escape path.
- Reduce your speed. Slow down, and keep an eye on the oncoming car.
- Ride off the road. If necessary, drive onto the shoulder or completely off the road to avoid the oncoming vehicle. If you've got to hit something, look for something soft – a haystack rather than a brick wall, for example.

Adapt driving for city streets and country lanes:

- In the city be extra alert of pedestrians crossing the road.
- Don't try to sneak through the right lane next to a turning tractor-trailer the driver may not see you.
- Try to avoid getting boxed between cars.

Anticipate problems. In many ways defensive driving boils down to anticipating trouble in time to do something about it. Expect the other drivers to do the wrong thing. If they don't, you'll be pleasantly surprised. And if they do, you'll be ready.