

CHAPTER 7 – DEFENSIVE DRIVING

The main objective of this chapter is to stress the importance of defensive driving. With each driver practicing the techniques of defensive driving, the number of motor vehicle collisions can be reduced, thereby preventing injuries or loss of life as well as reducing financial costs.

Qualifications

A. A Defensive Driver Is:

1. One who makes allowances for the lack of skill, knowledge and attitudes of other drivers.
2. One who knows that others will make mistakes, expects them and then attempts to avert any situation which could result in a collision.
3. One who avoids making mistakes.
4. One who expects the unexpected, assumes THE WORST and spots a potentially dangerous situation long before it occurs.

B. Reasons For Being a Defensive Driver:

1. To protect the lives and property of those in your care.
2. To benefit the school and the drivers financially through the use of good driving practices and preventative maintenance which avoids collisions.
3. To avoid being involved in a crash

C. To Become a Defensive Driver:

1. One must realize that driving is a full-time job.
 - a. The driver must concentrate on driving.
 - b. The driver must realize that driving is mental decision-making rather than physical abilities. It is a state of mind and attitude.
2. One must master the skill of defensive driving.
 - a. Scan your path of travel.
 - (1) Keep the eyes moving.
 - (2) Be aware of the movement of all vehicles and pedestrians.
 - (3) Watch each vehicle with suspicion until eye contact is made with the other driver.
 - (4) Be able to spot potential trouble or conditions which would make another driver change what he/she is doing. This perception improves with training and experience.

- (5) Communicate by using the horn, lights, turn signals, brake lights, position on the highway, or any other means available. Fewer collisions would occur if drivers (mentally) communicated with each other.

b. Identify specific hazards.

c. Predict what could happen.

- (1) Expect the other driver to do something that could create a dangerous situation.
- (2) Play the “What if?” game: What if the car doesn’t stop or turns left?

d. Decide your course of action.

- (1) Change speed or position, or take another action.
- (2) Always leave an escape route.
- (3) Do not cause others to commit an error.

e. Execute the proper course of action.

- (1) Collisions are caused by wrong or late decisions.
- (2) Sudden braking or dodging is usually a confession of ineptness.
- (3) An expert driver does not have many close calls.

D. Some Special Concerns of the School Bus Driver.

1. Since a school bus is constantly stopping for loading and unloading, it moves slower than other traffic. The driver may pull to the side of the road to allow vehicles to pass, requiring greater use of defensive driving skills.
 - a. Oncoming traffic is required to stop when a school bus is taking on or discharging students, BUT will they?
 - (1) Give another vehicle an opportunity to pass if possible.
 - (2) Signal well in advance for those who will have to stop.

- b. A slow-moving school bus can develop a large following of vehicles.
 - (1) Allow vehicles to pass even if it means pulling over and stopping.
 - (2) Make gradual stops so that tailgaters will not be surprised.
- 2. Picking up and discharging students at the roadside requires the driver to be alert and cautious. The driver should:
 - a. Teach students to be defensive walkers. Students should be certain that all vehicles, including the bus, have stopped before they cross the road.
 - b. Teach the children the proper way to cross.
 - c. Teach students respect for the road. Students should not feel safe when they get off the bus.
 - d. Watch students until they reach a safe spot on their residence side of the road.
- 3. Defending against a rear-end collision during a student pickup and discharge.
 - a. The Approach
 - (1) Make sure to check traffic in the front and rear. Pay special attention to vehicles following too closely or approaching the rear of the bus at a high speed.
 - (2) Actuate the warning lights approximately 300 feet prior to stopping (this is about the distance of a football field). It may be necessary to actuate the warning lights greater than 300 feet in order to get the attention of drivers to the rear of the bus.
 - (3) If your bus is equipped with a strobe light it may be necessary to turn it on as a defensive measure.
 - (4) Tap your brakes. The brake lights are in the direct line of sight of most vehicles following your bus. Tapping your brake lights is an excellent defensive step to gain attention of vehicles following the bus.
 - (5) Slow down gradually.
 - a. After Stopping
 - (1) Secure the bus by setting the parking brake (recommended for ALL student pickups and discharges).
 - (2) Students being picked up on the right side of the roadway shall not leave their place of safety until after the bus door is opened.
 - (3) Students who cross the roadway to be picked up shall not leave their place of safety until after receiving the hand signal from the bus driver. Important: Driver shall not give the hand signal until after checking traffic to the front and rear of the bus.
 - (4) Student(s) shall cross approximately 10 steps or more in front of the bus to lessen the chance of the student(s) being hit if the bus is struck in the rear and pushed forward.
 - (5) All the steps listed above are required to keep the students safe in the event you are rear-ended.
- 4. A bus load of students puts stress on the driver's emotions. The bus driver should realize:
 - a. That emotions may interfere with driving.
 - b. That one must control students and emotions in order to concentrate on driving defensively.
 - c. That one should not allow personal problems to affect driving.
- 5. The additional size and weight of the bus determines the driver's course of action. It requires:
 - a. More time for a bus to cross an intersection or to make other maneuvers.
 - b. More use of the mirrors.
 - c. More of a space cushion between large vehicles than with smaller vehicles.
 - d. A minimum of four seconds following distance behind vehicles.
 - e. Watching the road 12 to 15 seconds ahead will help you avoid sudden unnecessary stops.
 - f. Longer braking distances.
- 6. Whenever driving up and down steep grades and hills, the force of gravity plays a major role. When you have a load, you will have to

check traffic and use lower gears and go slower to climb hills. When driving down steep hills, gravity will tend to speed you up. You must go slow enough that your brakes can hold you back without getting too hot. If the brakes become too hot they may start to fade. The use of brakes on steep hills is only a supplement to the braking offset of the engine. The following is the proper snub braking technique:

- a. Check traffic
 - b. Apply brakes to feel a definite slow down.
 - c. Select proper lower gear.
 - d. Apply brakes to reduce your speed to five m.p.h. below your "safe" speed, release brakes.
 - e. When your speed has increased to your "safe" speed, repeat step "d." Repeat this as often as necessary until you have reached the end of the downgrade.
7. Special Driving Situations – Always drive the bus according to conditions. Conditions such as snow, rain, ice and fog, make maneuvering the school bus more difficult to drive. Poor visibility and slippery roads can cause major problems. Keep the following driving tips in mind during bad-weather driving:
- a. Check the bus conditions. The bus should always be in top condition. In bad weather this is particularly important.
 - b. Check lights, wiper blades, defrosters and windshield wiper fluid.
 - c. Reduce speed. Remember it takes longer to stop a school bus – even in good conditions than it does to stop an automobile.
 - d. Don't oversteer. Any sudden turn of the steering wheel may cause loss of control.
 - e. Don't overbrake.
 - (1) Learn to apply the brakes in a manner that prevents the wheels from locking.

- (2) When the front wheels are locked, the bus cannot be steered.
 - (3) Start braking earlier than usual for a stop in bad weather.
 - a. This allows time to stop the bus safely.
 - b. It gives others adequate warning.
 - f. Don't overpower. Apply pressure to the accelerator pedal as if an egg has been placed between the pedal and the sole of your shoe and must not be broken. Sudden acceleration may cause skidding.
 - g. Make sure others see the bus.
 - h. Use headlights (recommended anytime the bus is in use).
 - i. Use marker lights.
 - j. Use strobe lights as regulations permit. (See O.A.C. 3301-83-12.)
 - k. Touch brakes sooner to activate brake lights.
 - l. Use warning lights for students loading and unloading only.
 - m. Sound horn. Usually, if the driver must sound the horn, the brake pedal should be covered. Exception: Passing another vehicle.
8. Controlling a skid – Follow these procedures in a skid:
- a. Release the accelerator to take the power away from the rear wheels.
 - b. Steer in the direction you want to go.
 - (1) If the rear of the bus starts to slide to the right, steer to the right.
 - (2) Be ready to steer in the opposite direction when the bus starts to right itself.
 - (3) Do not brake. The tendency is to apply the brakes immediately but this only increases the loss of control.

Know the No-Zone

The No-Zone is the area around trucks where cars "disappear" into blindspots or are so close that they restrict the truck driver's ability to stop or maneuver safely. Both types of No-Zones greatly increase the potential for a crash.



Backing Up

When a truck is backing up, it sometimes must temporarily block the street to maneuver its trailer accurately. Never pass close behind a truck that is preparing to back up or is in the process of backing up. Remember, most trailers are 8 1/2 feet wide and can completely hide objects that suddenly come between them and a loading area. So if you try to pass behind the truck, you enter a (No-Zone) blindspot for you and the truck driver.

Passing

Another No-Zone is just in front of trucks. One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to cut in too soon and slow down after passing a big truck. Because of their size and weight, trucks need a much greater distance to stop than cars. If you don't give them enough space, you run the risk of being hit from behind. Be sure to maintain a consistent speed when passing and don't pull in front of the truck unless you can see the whole front of the truck in your rear-view mirror.

Rear Blindspots

Unlike automobiles, trucks have deep blindspots directly behind them. If you tailgate, not only do you make it impossible for the truck driver to see you, but you also cut off your own view of traffic flow. So, staying in this No-Zone is almost like inviting a collision.

Side Blindspots

Trucks have much larger blindspots on both sides than cars do. When you travel in these blindspots for any length of time, you can't be seen by the truck driver. If the truck driver needs to make an emergency maneuver or change lanes, he won't be able to see you and a crash could result.

Road Rage

For a variety of reasons, drivers can be short-tempered and take unnecessary chances behind the wheel. The result is an increase in crashes and fatalities. The next time you're driving and someone cuts you off, take a deep breath and forget it. Give the other driver the right of way. It is far more important to arrive safely at your destination than to let that driver know what you think of his or her driving abilities.

According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, beginning in the 1990s, aggressive driving has progressively increased. A study they sponsored indicates that violent traffic incidents have increased nearly seven percent per year since 1990. The study was based on 10,037 separate incidents of aggressive driving between January 1, 1990, and September 1, 1996. In Ohio in 1995, the Ohio State Highway Patrol cited 17,014 drivers for reckless operation.

The AAA study suggests that there is no one profile of an "aggressive driver," but most are young males between the ages of 18 and 26. In addition, the report states that the precipitating incidents are often "remarkably trivial." Such things as arguments over parking spaces, cutting another motorist off or refusing to allow passing. Other contributors to road rage include minor traffic crashes, obscene gestures, loud music, overuse of the horn, slow driving, tailgating, and failure to use a turn signal, among other behaviors, can be causes for road rage. The study also points out that "violent traffic disputes are rarely a result of a single incident, but rather are the cumulative result of a series of stressors in the motorist's life." In 23 percent of the traffic altercations, the aggressive driver used the vehicle as a weapon, and in 12 percent, a vehicle and a standard weapon such as a firearm, club or tire iron was used.

How can motorists protect themselves? The report concludes by stating that you should "never underestimate the other driver's capacity for mayhem. Be patient and keep your cool in traffic." The best way to avoid being the target of an aggressive driver is to use a little courtesy and common sense so that you arrive at your destination safely and alive.

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Summary

A defensive driver is safety-conscious at all times. With the realization that other people may not be as dedicated to safety, the bus driver must strive to reduce the margin of error which may lead to a collision. This requires the driver to be mentally alert as well as physically able to perform the task.

Crashes don't just happen. They are caused! Since collisions are caused, drivers may be able to control them. Exercise that control.

Notes