

Avoid Roadway Aggression



by **Debbie L. Feldman**

You're driving your bus when a motorist passes you, cuts you off, and slams on the brakes. Then he honks the horn and shakes his fist at you. What do you do to respond?

Between 1990 and 1996, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety in Washington, DC, studied more than 10,000 incidents of aggressive driving and found that at least 218 people were killed and 12,610 were injured when drivers took their anger out on other motorists. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that about one-third of 1996 motor-vehicle collisions could be traced to aggressive driving. As a bus driver, you're at risk from anger by car drivers who see you as too big and too slow and don't



like you blocking their way.

What is aggressive driving?

Aggressive driving includes speeding, tailgating, failure to yield, weaving in and out of lanes, passing on the right, running stop signs and red lights, and screaming at or making hand gestures to other drivers. When anger overrides safe driving, people can become aggressive and create a road rage situation.

If an aggressive driver sees you in front of him, especially if he's in a hurry, he could take it out on you. "What contributes to road rage is an impatient driver with the attitude that the space immediately in front of his vehicle belongs to him," says Alex Guariento, director of safety at Greyhound Bus Lines in Dallas. "A bus driver must be alert for feelings of road ownership and drivers with a "you-are-making-me-late attitude."

Get training

Often an automobile driver will dart in and out of traffic to create a confrontation with a bus driver or cause a bus driver to make an emergency stop. Bus companies need to address the road rage problem during their regular safety meetings and in driver training. "At Greyhound, road rage is covered during initial and in-service training. We teach drivers not to be 'sucked' into an argument or unsafe behavior," says Guariento. "We teach our drivers that if someone is provoking you by suddenly slowing down in front of your bus, reestablish and maintain a safe following distance. If worse comes to worse, stop and contact the



police.”

“Dealing with aggressive motorists is a constant training issue for bus companies,” says Paul R. Berne, vice president of claims for Lancer Insurance Company. “The key is to have adequately trained drivers behind the wheel who can respond appropriately to any situation.”

Don't be a victim

Lancer Insurance suggests the following tips to avoid a confrontation with an enraged driver:

- If you see any sign of aggressive driving around you, slow down and move to the right lane. Stay there until the trouble is gone.
- Watch for motorists who are leaning out of the window with a raised fist or are yelling at other motorists. Such behavior will usually be followed by aggressive driving.
- Since a top reason for aggressive driving is ‘running late,’ expect a higher risk of motorist road rage during peak morning and afternoon traffic periods, especially near sporting event locales and when approaching toll booths or bridges.
- Highway construction sites, especially those near large urban areas, are notorious for creating unexpected delays and frustrated drivers. Watch for lane jockeys and aggressive motorists in these areas.
- Keep your cool! There is nothing to gain and much to lose if you respond to gestures, verbal abuse or aggressive driving by motorists. Remember, you are responsible for the safety and well-being of your passengers and your



company's equipment and reputation.

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Avoid road war

School Bus Fleet magazine suggests the following ways for school bus drivers to avoid incidents:

- Avoid eye contact — aggressive motorists may feel challenged if you stare them down.
- Don't cut in front of motorists, no matter how big of a hurry you're in.
- Allow fellow motorists to “cut in” during a traffic jam.
- In rural areas, pull over to allow motorists to pass if several cars pile up behind you.
- Don't drive in the fast lane — that's fine for your fellow motorists, but not school buses.
- Don't allow your kids to aggravate fellow drivers, such as by making obscene gestures or comments.
- Don't tailgate — always maintain a safe distance from the vehicle in front of you.
- Use your horn sparingly — If you must get



someone's attention in a non-emergency situation, tap your horn lightly.

- Give the other driver the benefit of the doubt. Assume that their mistakes are not intentional or personal.

Be a professional

Jeff Barnett, chairman of the American Bus Association's Bus Industry Safety Council, suggests drivers be extra courteous to auto drivers.

"If you suspect an aggressive driver, give them the right of way. It doesn't cost you anything." If a driver gets aggressive, don't stop. "Don't give that driver what they want. Don't allow yourself to get engaged in cat-mouse situations." If an aggressive driver attempts to lure you into a crash, call your dispatcher and report the incident.

For more information

The National Safety Council has a 15-minute video called *Road Rage: How to Protect Yourself*. Call 800-621-7619 for more information.

To take the Driver Stress profile, "Are YOU an Aggressive Driver," visit the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety's Web site at <http://www.aaafoundation.org/text/aggressive.cfm>