

Defensive Driving

1. Basics of defensive driving

Defensive driving begins with the driver.

Driving defensively means that the driver:

- * stays alert to changes by looking well ahead - aiming high;
- * observes the entire situation;
- * recognizes potential hazards;
- * decides on an appropriate response; and
- * carries out his/her plan.

2. Seeing and Being Seen

It is important that as well as seeing clearly, a driver's rig be seen clearly by others.

All drivers should:

- * keep the windshield and mirrors clean and clear;
- * use mirrors and constantly scan the traffic to the front and sides of his/her rig;
- * look 10 to 12 seconds ahead of the vehicle in the city, and further ahead on the highway;
- * always use mirrors before changing speed or position in traffic;
- * signal all turns and lane changes;
- * keep the signal on until the move is completed; and
- * keep lights on for safety.

3. City Driving

Heavy traffic, narrow streets, and obstructed views are just some of the challenges the driver of a commercial motor vehicle faces when driving in the city.

Driving on city streets requires a driver's undivided attention and complete concentration. Staying alert, maintaining a safe speed, careful turning, and staying on posted routes are just some of the skills a driver needs to keep in mind when traveling in metropolitan areas. When driving in the city, a driver needs to make every effort to stay alert.

The following are just a few things a driver can do to help stay on top of the situation:

1. A driver should keep his/her eyes moving. Attention should never be focused on one object or event. An alert driver scans a block or two ahead, looking from one side of the street to the other.
2. Check all mirrors. A driver should be aware of what is to the rear and sides of his/her vehicle.
3. A driver should watch the taillights in front of him/her. This will help in anticipating when other drivers will stop or turn.
4. Keep in mind that bicycles and pedestrians may dart into traffic at any time and a driver may need to stop suddenly.

5. Be on the lookout for driveways, alleyways, and entrances and exits to parking lots. Often, a vehicle exiting these areas isn't visible until the last moment.
6. In an alley, a driver should also keep an eye out for overhead wires, delivery vans, and dumpsters.

The increase in the number of vehicles traveling in the city makes speed and space a very important issue for the professional driver.

The following are a few speed and space tips for city driving:

1. A driver should ensure that there's enough space between him/her and the vehicle ahead.
2. When stopped in traffic, a driver should wait to proceed until the vehicle ahead has moved a few feet. The vehicle ahead may stop suddenly and a driver may need extra space to stop his/her rig.
3. A driver should keep an eye on his/her speed. Reduced speed can help in safely stopping if a vehicle, bicycle, or pedestrian darts into traffic.
4. A driver should plan his/her route accordingly. Allow for extra time when driving in city traffic, especially during rush hour or when weather is bad.

4. Underpasses

Drivers need to approach all underpasses with care.

The following are tips to help drivers safely navigate underpasses:

1. Avoid unmarked or low clearance underpasses.
2. Approach all underpasses carefully. A driver should never assume the marked height is adequate.
3. Watch for signs of road repair. A few extra inches of blacktop can raise the road surface, changing the underpass' clearance.
4. Watch for "bridging." This happens when the road slopes down before the underpass and comes back up afterwards. Heights may be marked based on a center-to-center measurement which could trap a vehicle.

When approaching an unmarked underpass a driver should:

- * approach slowly, using four-way flashers as he/she is trying to determine if the rig will clear; and
- * if there isn't enough space, the driver should pull over and use another route (avoiding backing if possible).

5. Intersections

Crossing an intersection with a long vehicle can be a difficult maneuver. The first thing to remember is that due to the vehicle's additional length and slower acceleration (compared to an automobile) it takes longer to cross and clear intersections. Crossing an intersection at night presents additional hazards. Approaching drivers may not see the side of long vehicles. Drivers

of large vehicles need to recognize these problems and take extra care when crossing intersections, especially those that are uncontrolled.

At busy intersections and unmarked crossings, a driver should always stop and assume he/she does not have the right of way.

At all intersections drivers should slow down and watch for:

- * other vehicles;
- * pedestrians; and
- * people on bicycles, mopeds, and inline skates.

When approaching a controlled intersection a driver should stop two times. First, at the stop sign or light, then again after easing forward to a point where the driver can clearly see oncoming traffic. When a traffic light turns yellow as his/her vehicle approaches a crossing, the driver should slow down and stop.

6. Merging with Traffic

The weight of a vehicle's load as well as the ramp's length and degree of turn will determine how much time a driver needs to get his/her vehicle up to speed to safely merge with oncoming traffic. The size of the vehicle will determine how much space the driver will need to enter traffic.

When entering traffic the driver should:

- * size up the traffic;
- * signal early;
- * watch for an opening;
- * build up speed to merge smoothly;
- * watch his/her mirrors; and
- * watch for oncoming traffic.

When leaving an expressway the driver should:

- * signal and get into the turn lane as soon as possible;
- * check his/her mirrors to monitor the speed of the traffic that is behind the driver's vehicle on the ramp; and
- * shift down to a lower gear and make the exit.