

TAKE 5 Defensive Driving

HS02-003D (09-20)



Defensive driving is anticipating other drivers' mistakes, maintaining a safe speed, keeping an appropriate distance from other vehicles, and staying alert for possible risks on the road. Practicing defensive driving requires focus and attention, and can help motorists avoid crashes and other roadway dangers. While motorists cannot control other drivers' actions, the following defensive driving skills can help reduce the hazards caused by other people's bad driving behaviors.

Defensive Driving Skills

- **Remain focused.** One in five crashes involves driver distraction. Distractions such as eating, drinking, talking to passengers, reading, grooming, reaching for items, texting, or using electronic devices can take a driver's focus off the road. In 2017, the Texas Legislature passed a law making it illegal to use a wireless communications device for texting or emailing while driving. Many state municipalities passed stricter ordinances that ban all use of cell phones while driving. If drivers must text, email, call, or program a vehicle's navigation or sound system, pull off the road to a safe location. When driving an unfamiliar vehicle, such as a rental, learn the vehicle's controls before driving.
- **Wear seat belts.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, seat belts reduce the risk of death by 45% and the risk of serious injury by 50%. Always wear both a lap and shoulder seat belt, never a shoulder strap by itself.
- **Observe the surroundings.** Check rearview and side mirrors frequently. Scan the roadway for traffic and distant hazards, not just the vehicles and surroundings nearby.
- **Anticipate the actions of others.** Focus on other motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Expect the unexpected to come from side streets, driveways, and parking lots. Watch for drivers who shift from one lane to another. Be prepared to react appropriately.

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- **Keep a steady pace.** Drive the speed limit, but travel with the flow of traffic. Avoid sudden stops, changes in speed, and unexpected lane changes. Maintain one car's length of distance between vehicles for every 10 mph of traveling speed. Slow down and increase the distance between vehicles when driving in bad weather.
- **Know the blind spots.** Check mirrors and blind spots before changing lanes, turning, or merging. Most lane-change or merge crashes occur because drivers fail to notice another vehicle or obstacle. Drivers of large trucks have "no-zones" where vehicles and pedestrians disappear from their sight. Truckers cannot see a motorist if the motorist cannot see the truck's side mirrors. Always give trucks extra room to turn.
- **Do not get boxed in by traffic.** On multi-lane expressways, drivers traveling in the middle lane must watch for and avoid situations where other vehicles surround them on all four sides. Speed up or slow down to create room to maneuver safely through traffic.
- **Approach intersections with care.** Look for cross traffic in all directions before entering an intersection. Do not assume that other drivers will yield the right of way. When reaching an intersection at the same time as another vehicle, allow the other vehicle to go first unless the driver signals otherwise.
- **Increase visibility.** In addition to staying out of other motorists' blind spots, increase the vehicle's visibility. Use turn signals, turn on headlights at dusk or during rain, and ensure brake and taillights are operational. Clean headlights and taillights often. Drivers should optimize their visibility, too, by cleaning both sides of the vehicle's windshield and ensuring that eyeglasses and sunglasses are clean.
- **Use caution in work zones.** Work zones are high-fatality driving areas. Pay extra attention to the roadway, road construction signs, and roadway workers in designated work zones. Follow signals issued by flaggers. Watch for brake lights and changes in traffic patterns. Always merge well before reaching the lane closure. Be prepared to act. Traffic patterns in work zones can change daily.
- **Stay alert.** Driving requires quick instincts and reactions. Never drive under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or prescription medication that may cause drowsiness. Avoid driving when tired or

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sleepy. Pull over to a safe location and rest if tired. Always select a sober, designated driver before deciding to drink alcohol. Use a taxi or ride-sharing service if intoxicated.

For more information on safe driving tips, download or stream any of [DWC's free driving publications](#) or [videos](#). For more information on customized employee driving training programs, contact a [DWC Safety Training Specialist](#).



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