



# DEFENSIVE DRIVING



**A CRASH COURSE**

# Introduction

Each year, thousands of people are injured or die in job-related motor vehicle accidents. In fact, motor vehicle accidents are the number-one cause of employee injuries and deaths. Most of these accidents could have been avoided simply by driving defensively.

To be a defensive driver, you must:

- Prepare yourself and your vehicle for the road before getting behind the wheel
- Drive according to posted speed limits
- Never tailgate
- Eliminate distractions
- Use practical driving procedures in the city, on the freeway and in rural areas.

This handbook will take you on a crash course in defensive driving by explaining how to apply these techniques whenever you're behind the wheel – even when you're not on the job.

## Plan and Prepare

Before you head out on the road, follow this important safety checklist:

- Plan your route using landmarks.
- Examine underneath the vehicle for oil, water or brake fluid leaks.
- Use a tire gauge to make sure your tires are inflated to the recommended pressure.
- Check the levels of oil and windshield washer fluid.

- Familiarize yourself with the vehicle's displays and controls.
- Test the turning signals, headlights and brakes.
- Press the brake pedal. If it feels soft or sinks to the floor, the brakes may need fluid added to increase pressure.
- Clean both the inside and outside of all windows including front and rear Windshields to improve visibility.
- Fill up the gas tank.
- Sit up straight and raise your seat's head restraint so that it is even with your ears.
- Adjust the sideview and rearview mirrors.
- Place your hands at a nine and three o'clock position on the steering wheel if your vehicle has an air bag – other positioning could injure your hands and fingers if the air bag inflates. If your vehicle has no air bag, place your hands at a ten and two o'clock position.

## A Defensive Attitude

Part of learning how to be a defensive driver is to control your emotions when other drivers cut you off, tailgate or drive too slowly. Losing control of your emotions can lead to driver error, which accounts for nearly 80% of vehicle collisions in the United States. Always stay calm on the road and be a courteous driver. If you get upset, take a few deep breaths and count to ten to regain your composure.

## *Tailgating*

Tailgating is a common cause of losing control of your emotions. If you're being tailgated, maintain the posted speed and do not react. You can pull over to the shoulder of the road or change lanes if you're driving on a multi-lane road.

To avoid becoming a tailgater, *always* follow the two-second rule:

- Look for a sign, pole or other road marker.
- Watch for the moment when the end of the vehicle in front of you passes the marker, then count two seconds.
- If the front of your vehicle reaches the marker before you finish counting, decrease your speed until you achieve the desired two-second distance.
- Increase your following distance time to three or four seconds whenever you drive in rain, snow or fog. Also use a longer following distance on bumpy roads.

## Driven to Distractions

One of the most preventable, yet common factors in motor vehicle accidents is driver distraction. Many drivers use their vehicle as a portable office – complete with cellular phone, fax machine, laptop and printer. If you must make a phone call or use this equipment, pull over to the side of the road or into a parking lot. Avoid other distractions – such as eating, talking on the phone, reading, wearing headphones or writing – while driving.

Drinking, drugs and driving don't mix – and the numbers prove it. Approximately 55 percent of fatal motor vehicle collisions and injuries

are directly attributed to drivers under the influence. Even if you take prescription medication, seek the advice of your doctor or pharmacist before driving. And just because you drive sober, don't assume others are driving sober.

Driver under the influence may demonstrate one or all of these signs:

- Drifting, weaving or swerving the vehicle
- Driving at inconsistent or excessive speeds
- Responding slowly to traffic signals or disregarding them
- Driving without headlights at night
- Changing lanes frequently at excessive speeds

If you are driving behind someone you suspect may be under the influence, don't try to pass – keep a safe following distance. If the driver is behind you, get out of the way by turning right at the nearest intersection and let the driver pass. Avoid oncoming drunk drivers by slowing down and moving to the right.

## Practical Driving Procedures

There are specific differences of defensive driving techniques depending on whether you are driving on the freeway, in the city or on rural roads.

### *In the City*

When you drive in the city, you should pay special attention to one-way streets, parked vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles, and school buses. Look at least one-half block ahead for potential problems.

Turning is quite common in city driving, so follow these tips for turning safely:

- Get in the correct lane, signal at least 100 feet before the intersection and yield the right-of-way to oncoming vehicles and pedestrians.
- If two approaching vehicles signal for a left turn, both should take the lane closest to the center.
- While driving in heavy traffic, make a series of right turns around the block instead of attempting a left turn.

To be a defensive city driver, approach all intersections with caution. Don't assume that you have the right-of-way.

Backing up is a common maneuver when driving in the city. To back up safely:

- Place your hands on top of the steering wheel.
- Move the steering wheel in the direction you want to turn.
- Look out the rear window for increased visibility.

### *On the Freeway*

Enter the freeway by accelerating to the speed of traffic, then merge while using your turn signal when you see a safe gap between vehicles. When exiting the freeway, wait until you are in the deceleration lane before slowing to the posted ramp speed.

To pass a vehicle in front of you, use your turn signal then look in your mirrors and over your shoulder before changing lanes. To move back into the original lane, wait until you can see the front of the vehicle you're passing in your rearview mirror and then move into the lane.

If you miss your intended freeway exit, don't back up – continue to the next exit and follow signs and directions that will get you back on your planned route.

### *In Rural Areas*

You can have a pleasant and safe drive in the country – even when you share the road with the animals and farm equipment. Be patient and decelerate immediately whenever you see a slow-moving vehicle, a warning light or special signs such as “Deer Crossing.” *Never* pass without checking traffic to the rear and making sure that any oncoming traffic is at a safe distance.

Other hazards in rural areas are:

- Bumpy roads with ruts or sharp drop-offs
- Narrow bridges
- Poorly-marked intersections and railroad crossing without electric warning devices.

## Summary

You can reduce your risk of accidents by driving defensively every time you get behind the wheel. Remember:

- Pre-plan your route.
- Inspect your vehicle inside and out.
- Always wear your seat belt.
- Drive according to the posted speed limits.
- Always stay calm and in control.
- Increase your following distance in bad weather.

- Never tailgate. Follow the two-second rule.
- Eliminate unnecessary distractions inside your vehicle.
- Never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Follow practical driving procedures for the environment you're in – city, freeway or rural areas.

## Other facts the successful EHR DSP must know

If you are in a motor vehicle accident (ANY incident involving a person served and/or an EHR employee while on duty and a vehicle regardless of how minor the accident was or if that vehicle was moving at the time) then you MUST call the police and request a police report. If the incident occurred on private property and the police will NOT come, make the call anyway and note the date/time of call and who you spoke to on the vehicle accident form as proof you tried. Notify your immediate/on-call supervisor as soon as possible.

For facility based programs (any residential services or day/work programs) the company vehicles will have a vehicle book for each company vehicle. The vehicle book will contain the following:

1. Vital information page for each person typically transported in that vehicle.
2. General consent form to seek emergency medical treatment for each person typically transported in that vehicle.
3. Individualized needs list for each person typically transported in that vehicle.
4. Blank incident report forms
5. Blank vehicle accident forms



6. Blank vehicle maintenance checklists that are to be accomplished twice monthly.

When dealing with the medical or behavioral emergency:

1. If anyone in your vehicle is experiencing a medical emergency you should
  - a. pull over and immediately notify emergency response personnel (911)
  - b. apply standard CPR or first aid as needed/trained
  - c. unless unsafe to do so, remain in the vehicle to protect everyone from inclement weather, traffic or other safety hazards
2. To avoid/prevent the behavioral emergency
  - a. NEVER put an upset/angry person in the vehicle and then travel somewhere with them
  - b. Second DSP in the vehicle, also known as the support rider should ride in the back of the vehicle in a position that enables them the most visibility of everything going on as well as to prevent and/or aid access to others as needed.
  - c. People served should sit where it makes sense and is safe for them to do so. (I.e. someone with behavioral outbursts should ride as far back and over from the driver as possible away from a door, someone who has a tendency to pull hair should not be behind the driver, etc.)
3. If transporting an individual who is sitting in a wheelchair
  - a. Follow all posted instructions about how to enable the individual in/out of the vehicle while in their wheelchair.
  - b. Once positioned where they will ride ensure that the individual is completely secure within the wheelchair itself.

- c. Ensure that the separate seatbelt originating within the vehicle itself is applied safely
- d. Ensure that the wheelchair's wheel brakes are applied appropriately.
- e. Ensure that the chair is "four-pointed" in that all four safety straps are applied to the frame of the chair.

Each Employee must:

1. Ensure that they are aware of their driving classification while employed at all times (see driver classification statement of understanding.)
2. Notify their immediate supervisor or designee any time that status changes throughout their employment.
3. Notify their immediate supervisor of any accident, moving violation or suspension/revocation of their license as soon as possible.
4. Submit to the agency a motor vehicle report each year.
5. Maintain personal liability insurance in the amount of \$100,000/\$300,000/\$100,000; current registration, a clean motor vehicle report (5 year for initial report) and a current, valid AZ driver license in order to be a Class 3 driver that is allowed to transport persons served or other employees in their vehicle.
6. Maintain the driver class level necessary to properly serve who they are assigned to. Failure to do so could result in the termination of employment with that individual served. Comparable shifts/hours are NOT guaranteed due to forfeiture of driving status.