

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Benefits of Defensive Driving

Reviewing defensive driving principles with your drivers on a scheduled basis can help reduce the chance vehicular accidents, and the injuries and property damage that may come with them. Defensive driving starts with the driver and their understanding that safe driving begins, and ends, with them. Defensive driving involves doing everything possible to reduce the chance of an accident.

This process begins with the pre-trip inspection. Ensuring the vehicle's safety and operational systems are working properly prior to hitting the road will give your operator the added confidence that their equipment is roadworthy. At a minimum, the pre-trip inspection should include checks of all vehicle lights, the horn, the brakes and the tires. Defects should be reported, and addressed, by following your district-specific procedures. At no time should a vehicle with known defects be used.

The “cushion of safety” is used to describe an area to the front, sides and rear of the vehicle in which the driver should strive to keep free of other vehicles and hazards. To help keep these areas free of other vehicles and hazards, the defensive driver should scan 12-15 seconds ahead (which equates to three-to-four city blocks in a city setting and a quarter mile on an open road/highway). The mirrors also should be scanned every three-to-five seconds. These scans allow the driver to identify possible hazards and adjust their driving accordingly. A defensive driver maintains a safe following distance of four seconds when traveling under 40 mph and five seconds when traveling

over 40 mph. However, there are times when following distance must be extended further, and these are:

- When you have a tailgater – Increasing your following distance protects against a tailgater by providing you more time to slow gradually, which reduces the risk of a rear-end collision.
- When the vehicle is heavily loaded, because it will take you longer to slow down and stop.
- In adverse weather or road conditions, because if the road is wet, snow covered or stone covered, it will take you longer to slow down.
- When driving at night or in rain, snow or fog, because it may take longer to identify hazards.

To avoid a collision, a defensive driver must identify the hazard, understand the defense and take corrective action. The following are examples of correct defenses:

- Lag back when turning left to anticipate a driver making a sharp turn from cross traffic and being clipped.
- Cover the brake – The practice of putting your foot over the brake pedal, but not depressing it, i.e. possibly when approaching a traffic signal that has been green for a long time, in anticipation of it turning yellow.
- Avoid driving along side other vehicles. This keeps you out of their blind spot and vice versa.
- Avoid stopping on railroad tracks.
- Use high beams when driving at night.

d backing up when driving a large vehicle (i.e. a bus) or when pulling a trailer.

- Use a spotter when backing up.
- Lean forward in your seat and scan the mirrors. This allows you to change the mirror angle to increase scan width.
- Decrease speed during inclement weather or when visibility is reduced.

Countless injuries and losses are reported annually from vehicular accidents. Reducing the chance of driver and passenger injuries, and property damage, is the driver's responsibility. By practicing the defensive driving techniques discussed above, drivers may significantly reduce the chances of being involved in an accident.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.