

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

The Dangers of Aggressive Driving and Road Rage By Dennis Kane

Does it seem as if the number of vehicles on the road doubles annually? Have you ever crawled through traffic watching a tailgater in your rearview mirror or watching a car weave dangerously through the tightly spaced cars ahead? If so, you have witnessed aggressive driving and, in some areas of the state, it's commonplace.

Aggressive drivers put themselves, and other motorists including bus drivers, at risk with driving styles that include tailgating, cutting off other motorists, weaving through traffic, blocking, honking their horns and flashing high beams. If left unchecked, or when encountered by another aggressive driver, these behaviors can quickly escalate into road rage. To help reduce the risk of student transportation drivers becoming involved in these types of driving behaviors, and to reduce the risk of traffic accidents, school administrators need to think big-picture about their driver education program. Educating and providing information to your drivers, and in this case, employees, to reduce their accident risk is an important ingredient in a comprehensive driver safety program.

To fully understand aggressive driving and road rage and how they affect all drivers, we must first look at these issues from a distance. Aggressive driving includes any unsafe or reckless driving behavior performed intentionally without regard to other motorists. Things like racing, blocking, intentionally not following the rules of the road, voicing threats towards other motorists, tailgating, honking the horn and flashing headlights are all

included in this definition and *participating in these practices increases the risk of accidents to all motorists, including student transportation drivers.* It needs to be understood that participating in any of these behaviors takes focus away from the task at hand – driving! Road rage can come into play in many ways but aggressive driving is at its core and with the right trigger, an aggressive driver can quickly become enraged and start using his or her vehicle to threaten other motorists.

From a management standpoint, school entities must not only stress the importance of drivers not initiating any of these behaviors but also provide information on defensive practices to help their drivers avoid becoming angry. Driving while angry will negatively impact the driver's focus and can increase the risk of an accident.

When it comes to aggressive driving and road rage, the most basic rule is **DO NOT PARTICIPATE**. Other tactics that can help drivers remain calm and reduce the risk of becoming angry behind the wheel include the following:

- Practice deep breathing to calm down.
- Use that energy to focus harder on your own driving.
- Avoid eye contact (to help diffuse and not encourage an aggressive driver).
- If you made a driving mistake that triggered road rage, acknowledge it by waving (it's like apologizing – this can reduce the risk of the situation escalating).

- Remain calm by saying, “They’re not as good a driver as I am.”
- Understand that the other driver may be trying to drive safely as well.
- Understand that the other driver is trying to get you to react and that by doing so, you are not focusing on driving.
- If threatened with any type of weapon, contact the dispatcher via radio so police can be contacted for assistance and guidance.

If you are experiencing anger management issues, seek professional assistance (i.e., counseling) to minimize the chance of that behavior affecting your driving.

In addition, the following defensive driving principles can be used to help deal with aggressive drivers:

- Increase following distance when you have a tailgater.
- Use turn signals well in advance of a turn.
- Use flashers well in advance of a stop.
- Keep a vehicle length between you and the vehicle in front of you at stoplights so you can get around that vehicle in an emergency.
- Lag back when turning left to avoid being clipped by a turning, and possibly speeding, aggressive driver.
- Cover the brake when you think an aggressive driver is considering pulling out in front your vehicle.

Providing drivers and employees with these tips as part of a safety newsletter or toolbox safety talk may help keep drivers from initiating or becoming victims of aggressive driving and road rage.

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.