

Defensive Driving – Small Vehicles

Preparing to Drive Safely

Inspect the Vehicle

Before you move the vehicle:

- Check for obvious signs of damage
- Inspect the tires
- Clean the interior
- Adjust the driver's seat and steering wheel
- Check for appropriate documentation in the glove box
- Test brakes, wipers, headlights, turn signals and brake lights
- Remove mud, ice and snow off the vehicle and windshield

Adjust the Mirrors

A blind zone is an area you can't see due to configuration, vehicle obstructions or other visual limitations. Be aware of your blind zones and stay out of other drivers' blind zones.

To minimize blind zones, adjust the **left** and **right mirrors** to point away from your vehicle. You should barely see the body of your own vehicle in the reflection. Position your **rearview** mirror so that the view outside your back window is centered.

Remove Distractions

Before your trip:

- Plan your route
- Allow adequate time
- Put away your mobile devices
- Finish food, drinks and cigarettes
- Set the vehicle controls

Assess Your Condition

Wear your seat belt. Don't drive if you:

- Are upset
- Have been drinking alcohol
- Have taken medicine/drugs that impair your judgment/reaction time or cause drowsiness
- Are drowsy

Best Practices for Driving Safely

To drive safely:

- Buckle up
- Pay attention to your speed and the speed limit
- Keep an eye on what's ahead of you
- Use the "3-second rule" for following the vehicle in front of you
 - Increase to 6 seconds or more in inclement weather and poor conditions
- Allow tailgaters to pass you (do NOT honk or slam or tap brakes)

- Begin slowing down as soon as you see an obstruction, stop sign or intersection
- Avoid backing whenever possible (use mirrors and spotters when you must back up)
- Stay away from aggressive/angry drivers

Intersections

At intersections:

- Slow down or stop for yellow lights
- Never assume you have the right-of-way
- Never attempt to pass other vehicles or change lanes
- Delay acceleration when it's your turn to go
- Use caution at train and commuter rail crossings

Changing Lanes

When you change lanes:

- Signal well in advance
- Be aware of blind zones – yours and others'
- Remember that traffic already in the lane has the right-of-way
- Only change one lane at a time
- Do not weave in and out of traffic
- Avoid passing on another driver's passenger side
- Never pass on the shoulder

Remain Calm

No matter what is happening, remain calm while you drive:

- Avoid aggressive driving and road rage
- Do not pressure other drivers to go faster or get out of the way
- Do not cut people off
- Avoid honking and gesturing at other drivers
- Drive safely, steadily and predictably