

A Daily Dose of Defensive Driving

Defensive Driving- is it strictly “watching out for the other guy?” The answer is “NO!” There are several variables to making a safe trip, whether it’s driving to work or making a jobsite delivery.

All will agree that driving a vehicle is almost as important in today’s society and business world as breathing. It is a vital part of our lives. The average American drives more than 20 minutes to work one way. And if you eat it, feed it, wear it, use it, built it, open it or ordered it, odds are a vehicle delivered it. In fact, vehicle transportation is the life-blood of many of our businesses- receiving and delivering raw or finished products. So, defensive driving is essential to our business. How does it happen?

Plan Ahead - First, to arrive safely and on time, we have to do some planning. Ask these questions in the planning process and make prudent decisions: How far do we have to go? What time do we need to be there? What is the weather like outside along the entire route? Do we go thru school zones, towns, or other congested areas? If so, will my drive time be affected? Is my vehicle safe to drive? How heavy is my load? Is my vehicle safe to drive? Am I fit for duty?

Driver Condition- Yes, as the driver we must be alert and attentive to detail to drive defensively. We should have our thinking fully on the task of safely driving our vehicle- not worrying about the family, bills, or work problems that may lie ahead. We should not be impaired nor be in a rush, such as trying to drive 10 miles in 10 minutes knowing half our travel will include a 45mph speed zone. Distractions should be kept to a minimum. Even taking our eyes off the road to look at the cellphone or adjust the radio station has caused many drivers to run off the road and over correct their steering- causing a collision or vehicle over-turn. And have you ever spilled a cup of hot coffee in your lap? Your attention is definitely not on driving.

Vehicle Condition-Next, we should insure our vehicles are in safe operating order. Company vehicles are required to be inspected before they are placed into operation, which is DOT and OSHA safety regulation. This process should be documented and kept on file for 30 days. Our personal vehicles should be checked, at a minimum- when we fill the gas tank. Also, before operating the vehicle, drivers should insure the vehicle cab is clean and free of hazards. Many accidents occur because coffee cups, soda cans or fire extinguishers are free to roll around in the floorboard. This is why the DOT inspectors sometimes open the vehicle and take a peek inside. Loose debris and unsecured fire extinguishers are grounds for citations and monetary fines. In addition, if you are a delivery driver is the truck’s load secured so there will be no roadway spillage; this is a point of emphasis for law enforcement.

Road & Weather- The traffic light turns green and there are vehicles in front of us. Do we “floor it” or wait and begin counting before we slowly accelerate with traffic. Traffic ahead and road conditions should always be of concern. Collisions may be caused by following vehicles too closely; know the road conditions. Rainy or icy road surfaces will require a greater following distance to stop a vehicle, especially if it carrying a heavy load.

So, have a safe road trip and drive defensively. Plan ahead! Knowing your condition and the condition of your vehicle and roadways, may save a lot of pain, money and time.