

TECHNICAL INFORMATION PAPER SERIES: SAFE DRIVING HABITS

**PRACTICE GOOD DRIVING HABITS WITH THESE SAFETY TIPS FROM THE HARTFORD.**

Habits become a part of the way you live – and very much a part of the way you drive. That’s a problem, because we not only develop good driving habits, but also bad ones.

If a collision occurred every time a driver did something unsafe, bad driving habits wouldn’t develop. All too often, though, a driver gets away with poor judgment or behavior. So they habitually ignore stop signs, tailgate or drive over the speed limit.

Adopt safe driving habits instead. Unsafe behavior becomes a bad habit that may eventually cause a serious crash. But good driving can be just as habit-forming as bad driving.

Here are some good driving behaviors to help you adopt good driving habits.

MAKE A SAFE START

Instead of climbing behind the wheel and starting right off, start off right instead.

Adopt these habits:

Check out your vehicle before you drive.

- Look for oil, water or fuel leaks and for cut or worn spots on tires.
- Make sure the instrument gauges, windshield fluid and wipers, heater and defroster are working properly.
- Test your horn and check your turn signals and headlights.
- Keep all the lenses and mirrors clean.



Get rid of distractions when you make your pre-trip check.

- Clear the dashboard of papers or items that could cause glare or distract you.
- Store or secure loose items safely, including laptop computers.
- Keep change for tolls within easy reach.
- Check mirrors and get comfortable by adjusting your seat before you drive.

Turn off your cell phone.

- Don't talk on a cell phone while driving – it's a significant distraction and a bad habit.
- Use the cell phone only when you aren't driving and safely parked.

SLOW DOWN

A bad driving habit might get started on purpose – but it often ends by accident.

For example, drivers who play the red lights by maintaining vehicle speed while approaching an intersection, hoping the light will change and it won't be necessary to slow down. They get pretty good at it. And that's too bad.

Because before long it's not a game anymore – it's a habit that leaves the driver wide open to unexpected danger – like another driver on the intersecting street who tries to make it through the light at the last second.

The result? Maybe a crippling or even fatal crash. And the end of a bad driving habit. Try these habits instead:

Slow down when you approach a traffic light.

- If the light is green, approach with caution in case it changes.
- If the light is red, slow down and be prepared to stop in case it doesn't change.
- If the light is changing from red to green, slow down to give the intersection time to clear.

Slow down for all intersections – especially those without a traffic signal or sign.

- As you approach, look carefully for other traffic and pedestrians.
- Keep your foot poised over the brake so you can react quickly if you need to.
- Even if you have the right-of-way, never assume the other driver is going to give it to you. Slow down and be sure!

DRIVE DEFENSIVELY

Good driving performance comes from these good driving habits:

Turn with care.

- With right turns, don't pull wide to the left – start close to the curb, then swing out in a buttonhook pattern, so no one will get confused and try to pass you on the right.
- With left turns, don't cut your turn too short. Pull far enough into the intersection to make a proper, safe turn.
- If the traffic does not permit an immediate safe turn, your vehicle should not have its front wheels turned while waiting. If your wheels are turned and you are struck from behind, you will be pushed into the oncoming traffic.
- Communicate. Get in the habit of using your turn signals every time you make a turn or lane change.

Drive and pass at a safe distance.

- Don't creep up on the car ahead and follow too closely.
- Get in the habit of counting your space cushion. When the vehicle ahead passes a fixed object, start counting one thousand-and-one, one thousand-and-two ... until you've passed the same spot or reference point.
 - ~ Allow **3 seconds** when driving a car or van
 - ~ Allow **4 seconds** for a truck or bus
 - ~ Allow **5 seconds** if driving a tractor-trailer
- Keep an adequate space cushion when you pass another vehicle. Pulling up too closely limits the visibility you need to pass safely.

Use your mirrors.

This should be second nature to you – mirrors are among the best tools you have for safe driving.

- Use them to keep track of what the traffic is doing around you and behind you, especially before you pull out to pass.
- Keep your eyes moving.

When backing up, take extra precautions.

No matter how skillful you are, backing your vehicle can be dangerous. Try these tips:

- Use your mirrors, but keep in mind they can't cover all the blind spots.

- If necessary, get out and check the area you are backing into for things such as potholes in the pavement, poles, sign posts and pedestrians – especially children playing.
- Watch for overhead obstructions, such as utility wires, signs or roof overhangs.
- Get in the habit of backing into a parking space when you arrive, so you can drive out when leaving.

STAY ALERT

You can't drive your best if you're distracted – either mentally or physically. Stay alert. Take frequent breaks to stretch and rest. Fatigue can be a killer – so when you drive, be sure you are well rested, fully awake and fit to drive.

ADJUST TO CHANGING ROAD CONDITIONS

When driving conditions change, you have to change with them. Anything that reduces your vision – darkness, rain, snow, fog – should warn you to reduce your speed and increase your space cushion.

Slippery roads or strong winds can make handling your vehicle more challenging. Take extra care and slow down.

Get into the habit of adjusting your driving to the conditions – it can make the difference between a safe ride home and an accident.

LEARN MORE.

For more information, contact your Risk Engineering consultant today or visit us online at THEHARTFORD.COM/RISKENGINEERING.

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