

## Chapter 8 - Safe Driving Tips For Everyday Driving

### Use Seat Belts and Child Restraints

Before you drive, always fasten your seat belt(s) and make sure all your passengers are using seat belts or child restraints. Studies have shown that if you use seat belts, your chances of being hurt or killed in a traffic crash are greatly reduced.

Seat belts should always be worn with the lap belt low and snug across the hips and the shoulder belt across the chest. Shoulder belts should never be placed under the arm or behind the back. If your vehicle has a two-part seat belt system, be sure to wear both the lap and shoulder belt.

**Seat belts should be worn even if your vehicle is equipped with air bags.** While air bags are good protection against hitting the steering wheel, dashboard, or windshield, they do not protect you if you are hit from the side or rear, or if the vehicle rolls over. An air bag will not keep you behind the wheel in these situations.

An unrestrained or improperly restrained occupant can be seriously injured or killed by a deploying air bag. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends drivers sit with at least ten inches between the center of their breastbone and the center of the steering wheel. Children 12 and under should always ride properly restrained in a rear seat. Never put a rear-facing infant restraint in the front seat of a vehicle with a front passenger air bag.

If you need more information about child seat safety, contact: Department of Transportation, Highway Safety Division, website: [modot.org](http://modot.org) phone: (800) 800-BELT.

### Seat Belts — It's The Law

Missouri law requires the operator and front seat occupants of all passenger vehicles to wear a properly adjusted and fastened seat belt. However, ALL passengers accompanying an intermediate driver license holder must be properly restrained.

### Child Passenger Restraint Law

The law requires children of certain ages, weights and heights to be restrained by a child passenger restraint system, booster seat or safety belt when transported in any motor vehicle other than a public carrier for hire or school bus.



### Age, Weight and Height Classifications

- **Less Than Four Years Old** — Children less than four years old, regardless of weight, shall be secured in a child passenger restraint system appropriate for that child.
- **Less Than 40 Pounds** — Children weighing less than 40 pounds, regardless of age, shall be secured in a child passenger restraint system appropriate for that child.

- **Less Than Eight Years Old or 80 Pounds or Under 4'9"** — Children at least four years of age but less than eight years of age, who also weigh at least 40 pounds but less than 80 pounds, and are also less than 4'9" tall shall be secured in a child passenger restraint system or booster seat appropriate for that child.
- **Children At Least Eight Years Old, Greater Than 80 Pounds or Taller Than 4'9"** — Children at least eight years old, at least 80 pounds or children more than 4'9" tall shall be secured by a vehicle safety belt or booster seat appropriate for that child.

For more information on the Booster Seat Law refer to the Department of Transportation website: <https://www.modot.org/child-safety-seats>.

## **Defensive Driving**

To avoid making mistakes, or being in a crash because of someone else's mistake, you must drive defensively. As a defensive driver you should:

- Keep your eyes moving. Notice what is happening ahead of you and on the sides of the road, and check behind you through your mirrors every few seconds. Pay special attention to oncoming vehicles. Many head-on collisions occur by distracted drivers crossing the center line.
- Expect other drivers to make mistakes, and think what you would do if a mistake does happen. For example, do not assume that a vehicle coming to a stop sign is going to stop. Be ready to react if it does not stop. Never cause a crash on purpose, even if a pedestrian or another vehicle fails to give you the right-of-way.
- Do not rely on traffic signals or signs to keep others from crossing in front of you. Some drivers may not obey traffic signals or signs. At an intersection, look to the left and right, even if other traffic has a red light or a stop sign.

## **Proper Posture While Driving**

The way you sit and hold the steering wheel affects your driving. Good posture can help you stay alert and in full control of your vehicle.

- Sit with your back straight, upright, and relaxed against the seat.
- Move your seat close enough so you can easily reach the pedals but far enough away that your elbows are in front of you when you hold the steering wheel.
- Keep both feet within reach of the floor controls.
- Keep both hands on the steering wheel.

## **Steering**

Use a proper grip. Place your left hand between the seven & nine o'clock positions and your right hand between the three & five o'clock positions on the steering wheel. This position is comfortable and allows you to make most turns without taking your hands off the wheel.

Look well down the road, not just at the road in front of your vehicle. Look for traffic situations where you will need to steer or slow before you get to them.

When turning corners, turn the steering wheel using the hand-over-hand technique. Do not turn the wheel with just the palm of one hand, because you could lose control. When you complete a turn, straighten out the steering wheel by hand.

**Steering Wheel Locking Device** — Never turn your vehicle's ignition key to the "lock" position while your vehicle is still in motion. This will cause the steering wheel to lock if you try to turn the steering wheel, and you will lose control of your vehicle.

### **Following Other Vehicles**

Be sure to keep a safe distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. You need a safe distance to stop or turn to avoid a crash. Rear-end crashes are very common. They are caused by drivers who follow too closely and cannot stop in time when the vehicle ahead suddenly stops.

### **Three Second Rule**

A good way to measure your safe following distance is to use the "three second rule." Choose an object near the road ahead, like a sign or telephone pole. As the vehicle ahead of you passes it, count slowly, "one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three." If you reach the object before you finish counting, you are too close to the vehicle ahead.

### **Space Behind**

It is not always easy to maintain a safe distance behind your vehicle.

However, you can help keep the driver at a safe distance by keeping a steady speed, and signaling in advance when you slow down. Follow these safety tips:

- Try to find a safe place out of traffic to stop and pick up or let off passengers.
- If you want to parallel park and there is traffic coming behind you, put on your turn signal, pull next to the space, and allow vehicles to pass before you park.
- When you have to drive so slowly that you slow down other vehicles, pull to the side of the road when it is safe to do so, and let them pass. There are turnout areas on some two-lane roads you could use. Other two-lane roads sometimes have passing lanes.
- If you are followed too closely or "tailgated" by another driver, and there is a right lane, move over to the right. If there is no right lane, wait until the road ahead is clear and then reduce speed slowly. This will encourage the tailgater to drive around you. Never slow down quickly to discourage a tailgater. This will only increase your risk of being hit from behind.

### **Space To The Side**

You need space on both sides of your vehicle to have room to turn or change lanes.

- Avoid driving next to other vehicles on multi-lane roads. Someone may crowd your lane or try to change lanes and pull into you. Move ahead or drop behind the other vehicle.
- Keep as much space as you can between yourself and oncoming vehicles. On a two-lane road, this means not crowding the center line. In general, it is safest to drive in the center of your lane.
- Make room for vehicles entering on a multi-lane roadway. If there is not a vehicle in the lane next to you, move over a lane.
- Keep extra space between your vehicle and parked vehicles. Someone could step out from a parked vehicle, from between vehicles, or a parked vehicle could pull out.

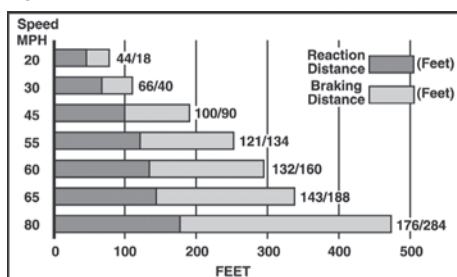
- Give extra space to pedestrians or bicyclists, especially children. They may move into your path quickly and without warning. Wait until it is safe to pass.
- When possible, take potential hazards one at a time. For example, if you are overtaking a bicycle and an oncoming vehicle is approaching, slow down and let the vehicle pass first so you can give extra room to the bicycle.

## Stopping Distance

Your stopping distance equals your reaction distance plus your braking distance. If you are driving fast, are very tired, or if your vehicle has bad brakes, you will need more space to stop your vehicle.

The following distance equals your reaction distance plus your vehicle's braking distance at different speeds. The reaction distance is the distance you travel after you see a danger and before you apply your brakes. In the chart shown below, the reaction distance is for 1.5 seconds. You have to be alert to react within one and one-half seconds.

The braking distance is the distance you travel after you apply your brakes and before your vehicle comes to a stop. In the chart shown below, the braking distance is for a vehicle with good brakes and tires, in good weather and on a good road.



## Average Stopping Distance of Cars on Dry Level Pavement Letting Others Know What You Are Doing

Generally, other drivers expect you to keep doing what you are doing. You must warn them when you are going to change direction or slow down. This will give them time to react to what you do.

## Signal When You Change Direction

You should use your turn signals before you change lanes, turn right or left, merge into traffic, or park.

- Get into the habit of signaling every time you change direction. Signal even when you do not see anyone else around. It is easy to miss someone who needs to know what you are doing.
- Signal as early as you can. Try to signal at least 100 feet before you make your move. If there are other streets, driveways, or entrances between you and where you want to turn, wait until you have passed them to signal.
- If another vehicle is about to enter the street between you and where you plan to turn, wait until you have passed it to signal your turn.

- After you have made a turn or lane change, make sure your turn signal is off. After small turns, the signal may not turn off by itself. Turn it off if it has not clicked off by itself. If you do not, other drivers might think you plan to turn again.

### **Using Your Horn**

Do not use your horn unless you have to. Needless use of your horn may distract other drivers and cause a traffic crash. There is only one reason to use your horn: to warn other drivers. Your horn should not be used as a display of anger or frustration.

### **“Slow Poke” Driving**

It is against the law for you to drive slower than the posted minimum speed under normal driving conditions. You may drive more slowly than the minimum speed if you are driving in bad weather, heavy traffic, or on a bad road.

If there is no posted minimum speed, it is still against the law for you to drive so slowly that you block traffic. If you have to drive more slowly, and vehicles line up behind you, pull over and let them pass. Many crashes are caused by slow drivers who block other traffic. Remember, slower is not always safer.

### **Carbon Monoxide**

Beware of carbon monoxide poisoning. Vehicle motors give off carbon monoxide which is a deadly gas. To avoid carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Do not leave the motor running in a garage.
- Do not leave the motor running and windows closed when you park your vehicle.
- Do not use the heater or air conditioner in a parked vehicle with the windows closed.
- Do not leave the vents open when following closely behind another vehicle.
- Do not drive with a defective muffler or exhaust system.

### **Tips For Avoiding a Deer-Vehicle Crash**

You can reduce your odds of being involved in a deer-vehicle crash by applying these precautionary measures:

- Be especially alert and use caution when traveling through areas marked with deer crossing signs.
- Deer seldom travel alone. Chances are if you see one deer crossing a road or notice a struck deer on the side of the road, there are others nearby.
- Be especially cautious in areas around fields, streams, and gardens where deer tend to congregate.
- Most deer-related crashes occur in January, May, and October through December.
- Highest-risk periods are from sunset to midnight and the hours shortly before and after sunrise.
- After dark, use high beams when there is no opposing traffic. High beams will illuminate the eyes of deer on or near a roadway and provide greater motorist reaction time.
- To reduce the likelihood of serious injury in a crash, be sure all vehicle occupants wear seat belts and children are properly restrained in child safety seats.

- If you see that a crash is unavoidable, do not swerve. Swerving off the road or into the path of an oncoming car can increase the risk of injury.
- Make sure there is no traffic behind you before slowing suddenly. Too much brake pressure can cause the front end of the vehicle to drop down, striking the deer in the legs and allowing the body to come into the passenger compartment of the vehicle.
- If you are involved in a crash:
  - Report the crash to a local law enforcement agency;
  - Obtain a police report (if required) to file a claim for coverage with your insurance company; and
  - Contact a local Missouri Department of Conservation agent to report where the crash occurred. This can help to identify frequent deer crossing areas.

## **Tire Pressure**

Prior to entering the vehicle, check the tire pressure using the recommended PSI (pounds per square inch) located in the vehicle owner's manual or the driver's side door jam of the vehicle. Use a tire pressure gauge to check your psi. If your psi is above the number listed in the owner's manual or on your door jam, let air out until it matches. If below, add air (or have a tire professional help you) until it reaches the proper number.

You may measure tread depth using the penny test. Once every month, or before you embark upon a long road trip, check your tires for wear and damage problems. An easy way to check for wear is by using the penny test.

- Take a penny and hold Abraham Lincoln's body between your thumb and forefinger.
- Select a point on your tire where the tread appears to be lowest and place Lincoln's head into one of the grooves.
- If any part of Lincoln's head is covered by the tread, you're driving with the safe amount of tread. If your tread gets below that, (approximately 2/32 of an inch) your car's ability to grip the road in adverse conditions is greatly reduced.

## **What to Do and Expect When Stopped by Law Enforcement**

Law enforcement officers conduct traffic stops because they observe a traffic violation or are conducting a police investigation. Being stopped by a law enforcement officer can be a stressful experience but knowing what to do during the stop will help ensure your safety, the safety of other motorists, and the safety of the officer.

When you see emergency lights behind you, stay calm, activate your turn signal, and pull off or to the side of the roadway as soon and safely as possible. Turn off the ignition and radio, and stay in your vehicle unless directed by the officer to exit. Keep your hands on the steering wheel so they are easily observable. Ask your passengers to remain calm and to stay in the vehicle while keeping their hands in plain view as well. Give the officer your full attention. Cell phones and mobile devices should not be used by you or any of your passengers. Do not make sudden moves or search for your driver's license or vehicle documents – wait for the officer to give you instructions. If you have a weapon(s) in the vehicle, inform the officer upon first contact.

If it's nighttime, the officer may direct a spotlight at your vehicle once stopped. To assist with visibility, turn on your interior lights as soon as you stop to help the officer see inside your vehicle.

The officer will usually explain why they stopped you and may ask you questions about your trip. If the officer isn't in uniform they will show you their law enforcement credentials or you may ask to see them. Follow all instructions the officer gives you or your passengers. The officer may ask to see your driver license, proof of insurance, and vehicle registration. If the documents are out of your reach, tell the officer where they are before you reach for them. If you have questions, politely ask for clarification. If the officer asks you to exit the vehicle, stay safely away from traffic and keep your hands in plain view.

When the officer completes their interaction with you they may issue a warning or a traffic ticket which may include a fine. The officer will typically explain whatever action is being taken. If you have questions, respectfully ask the officer to clarify. If you disagree with the officer's decision to issue a traffic ticket, don't prolong the contact by arguing with the officer. If you wish to contest the ticket, you will have the opportunity to explain your point of view of what happened in court. Your acceptance and signature on a traffic ticket is not an admission of guilt; however, the refusal to sign a traffic ticket may result in your arrest. If you believe the officer acted inappropriately, document the officer's behavior and report it to the officer's agency in a timely manner. The name of the officer and law enforcement agency will be on the ticket or you may ask the officer to provide this information.

The enforcement of traffic laws is an effective tool in changing unsafe driving behavior and reducing crashes. If you receive a warning or a ticket for a traffic violation, its purpose is to deter illegal and/or unsafe behavior. Good communication from all involved parties can make a traffic stop a safe experience for all parties involved.

If you are the subject of a traffic stop, you have legal rights created by the Constitution and the law. These include the right to be free from unreasonable search and seizure, the right to be free from being forced to incriminate yourself, which is commonly referred to as the right to remain silent, and the right to an attorney. Please consult an attorney licensed to practice in the State of Missouri if you have questions about these and other rights.