



TDCJ Risk Management's Training Circular

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SEPTEMBER VEHICLE SAFETY



How many times have you jumped in a vehicle, inserted the key and driven off not ever thinking about vehicle safety? We get into the vehicle, thinking about everything we need to get done that day. Then we shift into drive and **ZOOM** off without giving much thought to how safe, or unsafe, we're being while being behind the wheel. This is a daily ritual because of the busy lives we lead. These days with everyone's life so busy, paying attention while driving can be difficult. How many times have you suddenly noticed you don't remember driving the last three miles you traveled?

SCARY ISN'T IT!!

We should stop and think is it safe driving like this?



Although your attention may only be diverted for a split second, this could be a life altering event for you and your loved ones.



According to Road Trip America, about 50,000 people die each year in collisions on the roadways of the United States. By most estimates, over twenty-two million are injured. The costs associated with such collisions are staggering - often quoted at more than \$80 billion. TDCJ is a large agency and we have units and areas all over Texas, this means a lot of travel time. Studies conducted by the Texas Workers' Compensation Commission and the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that transportation incidents account for 40% of occupational fatal injuries in Texas. Here are a



few tips to help you become a safe and observant driver.

★Pay Attention - "I never saw him!" is the most common excuse heard after a collision. Was the other vehicle invisible? Virtually all collisions involve inattention on the part of one or both drivers. Inattention can involve many things, some of which are day-dreaming, talking on cell phones, texting, distractions, sleepiness, fatigue, "highway hypnosis," talking, etc. The primary attribute necessary for a safe driver is alertness, and paying attention is the most important driving task because it helps create the time you need to recognize hazards and avoid a collision. As of September 1, 2009 **House Bill 55** makes it illegal to use a wireless communication device in a school zone unless the vehicle is stopped or a



hands-free device is used. Many cities and counties are posting signs at the beginning of each school zone to inform drivers that using a wireless communication device is prohibited and the operator is subject to a fine. The intent of HB 55 is to improve safety in school zones. **Drive now and talk later**



✪ **Yield** - "Nobody ever yielded their way into a collision." Think about it. If you are in doubt about who has the right of way, give it away. The other guy may be wrong, but you can end up hurt or dead.



✪ **Don't Speed** - Speeding - defined as exceeding the posted speed limit or driving too fast for conditions - is a factor in nearly one-third of all fatal crashes. Speed reduces the amount of available time needed to avoid a crash, increases the likelihood of crashing and increases the severity of a crash once it occurs.



✪ **Don't Drive Impaired** -

Applied to driving, impairment means there is a factor present that decreases your ability to operate your vehicle safely.



✪ **Wear Your Seat Belts** - Without a doubt, seat belts are the most significant safety device ever invented. Seat belts do several things for you. They provide impact protection, they absorb crash forces, and they keep you from being thrown out of the vehicle.



As of September 1, 2009 **House Bill 573** requires all occupants of a vehicle, **NO** matter their age, to be secured by a safety, belt, **NO MATTER** where they are seated in the vehicle.

- * Changes the definition of a passenger vehicle to include a passenger van designed to transport 15 or fewer passengers including the driver.
- * Removes the current exemption for third-party Medicaid transportation provisions regarding the use of child passenger safety seats.
- * Prohibits a motorcycle operator from carrying a passenger under the age of 5 unless the child is seated in

a sidecar attached to the motorcycle.

Don't forget to buckle up!!

✪ **Don't Run Red** - First, there are two basic types of red light runners - there's the daydreamer or distracted driver who just doesn't see it, and then there's the driver who's impatient and accelerates on the yellow signal instead of stopping and



waiting the average 45 seconds of a signal cycle! Some of us are guilty of both offenses. Are we really in that much of a hurry? Running red lights kills hundreds of people very year.

✪ **Chill Out** - Driving safely is all about attitude. Think about it - if you've been driving for a while, you know most all the rules - **OK**, so maybe you do need a refresher occasionally - and you know how to drive "defensively." You may not think you do - but you do. You learn by surviving to drive another day.

What we often lose sight of are the dangers of driving—it is such a normal part of our lives that we don't consciously think about how dangerous it really is.



Thinking about this occasionally is a good thing.

🚗 **Look Down The Road** -

This means keep your eyes **UP** and looking down the road. Many drivers focus on the road only 5 or 8 seconds ahead. You should be looking about 15-20 seconds ahead of your vehicle, farther if you can. This gives you the time to recognize and avoid most potential hazards before they become a problem. You'll see lane restrictions or construction areas, traffic congestion, truck entrances, mishaps, etc. This technique is also useful for new drivers when learning how to steer. Keeping your eyes focused far down the road (instead of just past the end of the hood) creates stability in the roadway. In other words, it helps eliminate the unsteady weaving that is one characteristic of a novice driver.



🚗 **Create Space: Use the "Two-Second-Plus Rule"** - **Guard** your safety by actively creating space around your vehicle, never allowing yourself to get "boxed in." Adequate space creates time and helps you avoid



collisions. Maintain at **LEAST** two seconds of following distance, more if you can. Adjust your position in traffic as necessary to avoid driving in others' blind areas. Don't allow yourself to be tailgated - change lanes or adjust your speed to encourage tailgaters to pass you.

🚗 **Drive to Communicate** -

You want to know the other driver sees you, and this rule will provide you with some ways to make sure they do. Use your lights and horn when necessary to let others know you are there. If you make eye contact with another driver, there is perhaps less chance he will pull out in front of you or make some other error that infringes on your space (although you cannot count on that.) Even more likely, if you are looking at the other driver, and he is **NOT** looking at you, then you know there is an increased possibility he might not be aware of your presence.



🚗 **Always Signal Your Intentions** - Ask people what are their "pet peeves" about other drivers; a common reply is that other drivers don't signal turns and lane changes. How many times do you see drivers who do not signal? Or worse, drivers who signal a

right turn but turn left?

Other times, especially with vehicles



whose signals do not self-cancel (trucks and motorcycles in particular), you'll see the oblivious driver cruising down the road with a signal still blinking when the turn was perhaps miles back down the road! It is important to pay attention.

🚗 **Avoid Distractions!** - It is very important that we be responsible for our actions and the results of those actions.

Pay attention to our surroundings and situations. It's important to recognize these and make constant efforts to avoid getting distracted.



🚗 **Driving in the Rain** -

Allow for more travel time. You should plan to drive at a slower pace than normal when the roads are wet. Keep in mind that traffic is likely to be moving slower as well. There's also the possibility that your preplanned route may be flooded or jammed. Whatever the case, rushing equals higher risk. Brake earlier and with less force than you would normally. Not only does this increase the stopping distance between you and the car in front of you, it also lets the

driver behind you know that you're slowing down. Also, be more meticulous about using turn signals, so that other drivers know your intentions, and take turns and curves with less speed than you would in dry conditions. If it's raining so hard that you can't see the road or the car in front of you, pull over and wait it out.



☉Start Rested - Keep Fresh! - Collision statistics show fatigue is a major collision factor. We can even identify areas where fatigue collisions commonly occur - usually ten to fifteen hours out from major cities along the interstate highways. It's fine to be excited about your road trip, and it's great to plan for an early start, but consider that living to see your next road trip can depend on your staying rested on THIS one. Fatigue limits your coordination and ability to multitask effectively; these are key to your job as a driver, especially at higher speeds.



☉Slow Down When Approaching Intersections! - Statistically, one of the collisions that is most likely to be fatal or cause serious injury is

the one that happens when two vehicles collide at 90 degree angles. We call it a "**T-bone.**" These are the collisions that happen in the situation described above. Imagine another vehicle hitting you at 52 mph - right into your



driver's side door. It's easy to see how people get hurt or killed in these collisions. In many cases, your air bags won't protect you in a T-bone. Even your seat belt may be of limited value, if you are hit directly from the side. From a 90-degree side angle, you are in a most vulnerable position.

☉Secure Loose Objects! - Many injuries are caused by loose objects that "**fly**" in a collision. When your vehicle suffers a sudden deceleration (as in a collision), the only things that stop with it, at least immediately, are the ones that are secured somehow. When the vehicle decelerates, a loose object temporarily keeps traveling at the speed the vehicle was originally going, until it hits something else in the slowing vehicle - like you, **maybe.**



Now that you have some driving safety tips, have a great time in your travels and we will see you when you get back.



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