

Safety Circular

Safe Driving and Road Safety

When driving is part of your job duties, whether you are behind the wheel of a rental vehicle, a van, a car, or an eighteen-wheeler, you are a professional driver. Most drivers can drive around the block without incident, but it takes a dedicated professional to drive perfectly for thousands of miles.

When professional drivers are in control of any vehicle, they should always remember that defensive driving is a full-time job. Take time to complete pre-trip checklists and perform inspections that familiarize you with the vehicle and identify unsafe mechanical conditions that may need repair.

The driving conditions of today's roads and highways demand a higher level of skill, knowledge, and decision-making ability. A defensive driver is someone who looks out for the mistakes of other drivers; not merely a person who has had the good fortune to avoid accidents.

SIGNALS, SIGNS, AND MARKERS

Traffic signals help provide for the orderly movement of traffic. Drivers must obey these signals except when an officer is directing traffic. You must obey a traffic officer at all times, even if he is telling you to do something which is ordinarily considered against the law.

Traffic signs can help you to be a better driver in the following ways:

1. They WARN of hazards ahead that would otherwise be difficult to see.
2. They GUIDE drivers to their destination by identifying the route.
3. They INFORM of local regulations and practices.
4. They REGULATE the speed and movement of traffic.

- Warning signs alert drivers to conditions which lie immediately ahead and tell them what to look for. There may be road hazards, changes in direction or some other situation you should know about. Not only must warning signs be observed for the sake of safety, but to disregard them may be a traffic violation.
- Do not park, stop, or stand by your vehicle in a parking space reserved for disabled persons, unless your vehicle has a disabled license plate or windshield identification card.
- Regulatory signs tell us what we must do. Drivers are required to obey them in the same manner as traffic laws. These signs are one way to help protect your safety.
- Guide signs are especially helpful when you are not in your home area. They tell you what road you are on and how to get where you wish to go. They furnish information which makes the trip more pleasant and interesting.



SPEED LIMITS

It is the employee's responsibility to adhere to all laws pertaining to the operation of a motor vehicle. The employee is also responsible for any violation associated with the operation of a state vehicle.

Generally you should drive at the same speed as the main stream of traffic. You should always be aware of how fast you are traveling. You must obey speed limits, but a good driver does even more.

All drivers are required to obey posted maximum and minimum speed limits. These limits are designed to provide for the orderly flow of traffic under normal driving conditions. During periods of heavy traffic, inclement weather, low visibility, or other poor driving conditions, speed must be adjusted so that accidents will be avoided.



ACCIDENTS

If you are operating a motor vehicle that is involved in an accident resulting in injury to or death of a person, you must immediately stop your vehicle at the scene of the accident (or as close as possible) without obstructing traffic. If your vehicle is not stopped at the scene of the accident, you must immediately return.

When an employee is involved in an accident in a state vehicle, the nearest law enforcement agency shall be notified, unless the accident occurred on TDCJ property. If the accident occurred on TDCJ property, the Warden or ranking authority shall be contacted. For additional information regarding accidents involving TDCJ vehicles, review AD-02.50 VEHICLE POLICY.

PEDESTRIAN/WORKER SAFETY

Avoid turning your car into a deadly weapon. You should always be on the lookout for people on foot, whether or not they have the right-of-way. Drivers must yield to pedestrians in the following situations:

Situation 1 — Uncontrolled intersections — At an uncontrolled intersection, if there are no traffic signs or signals and if the pedestrian has entered the crosswalk, you the driver should give him the right-of-way.

Situation 2 — Controlled intersections — If the pedestrian has a "WALK" signal or if no pedestrian control signals exist at a green light, you should give the pedestrian the right-of-way. If the light changes after the pedestrian has already entered the crosswalk, you should still give the pedestrian the right-of-way.

If you see a pedestrian crossing or attempting to cross the street, slow down, use your horn if necessary, and be prepared to stop.

Be alert to a pedestrian guided by an assistance animal or carrying a white cane. A driver shall take the necessary precautions to avoid injuring or endangering a pedestrian crossing or attempting to cross the street. The driver shall bring the vehicle to a full stop if injury or danger can only be avoided by that action.

The driver should always pay special attention to the pedestrian and the bicyclist. However, there are certain safety rules which pedestrians and bicyclists should follow also.



3 STEPS TO SAFE DRIVING

Step 1: IDENTIFY THE HAZARDS: Be vigilant when behind the wheel. Keep your eye sweeping from mirror to road to mirror to ensure that not only are you aware of what's in front of you, but what may be approaching from behind. Other things to look for might include:

- Inattentive drivers near you. (i.e. on a cell phone, driving while eating, etc.)
- Deteriorated road conditions. (i.e. wet, icy, flooded, loose gravel, under construction, etc.)
- Heavy traffic conditions.
- Wildlife. (i.e. deer, wild hogs, livestock — this is Texas, we've got all kinds of animals that could wander out onto the highway!)
- Impaired drivers. (i.e. intoxication, exhaustion)

Step 2: ASSESS THE RISK: Assess the impact of each hazard in terms of potential loss and severity. Determine the level of threat the risk is to you. If severe, decide what control measures need to be taken to decrease risk exposures.

Step 3: ANALYZE RISK CONTROL MEASURES: Once you have identified the hazards and assessed the associated risk, you should decide on some controls

that can be employed to reduce or mitigate the hazards:

- Check the weather and drive accordingly. Don't take chances with summer rain. The roads may become slippery and visibility may be poor.
- Check for tire tread depth and windshield wiper operation.
- Listen to local radio stations for road conditions.
- Travel outside of peak-travel times. Drive knowing that you may be slowed by construction, accidents, or for other untold reasons. Keep road rage caged!
- DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE. Use a designated driver program.
- Get plenty of rest before venturing out of town .
- Drive defensively and be especially cautious on roads you have not previously traveled.

Remember, a lot of people are counting on you to make the right decisions when out on the road. Your safety isn't the only one at risk.



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The Safety Circular, a publication of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Risk Management Department, is published monthly in an effort to promote and enhance risk management awareness on issues relating to TDCJ employees.

Comments, suggestions and safety related items are welcome.

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