



JOB AID

Avoiding Rear-End Collisions
Large Vehicles (US)

Avoiding Rear-End Collisions – Large Vehicles (US)

The six major factors that contribute to rear-end collisions are lack of concentration, following distance, time management, intersections and caution lights, construction zones and fatigue.

Lack of Concentration

Many motorists have been killed because truck drivers were not paying attention to the traffic in front of them. Quite often the truck drivers were also fatalities in these accidents. Financial problems, marital problems and disagreements with dispatch or customers are on the driver's mind rather than defensive driving.

To keep your mind on driving:

- Commit yourself to being a professional driver
- Do not allow distractions from your driving concentration
- Do not use your cell phone
- Mentally unload any problems before you get behind the wheel
- Pull over to a safe location somewhere and take a walk to clear your mind or get on the phone and work out the problem with the involved parties. If that is not possible or feasible, then tell yourself that you will take time to ponder these pressing matters when you take a break from driving
- Listen to soothing or instrumental music to take your mind off your worries
- Always ask yourself, "If that car ahead of me does a panic stop unexpectedly, will I be able to stop in time?"
- Be especially careful in or near urban areas where there is merging traffic. Watch for the signs that indicate that either the left or right lane will end, which often causes congestion and slowdowns or stoppage of traffic

Following Distance

The driver of a truck must maintain an appropriate following distance in order to stop in time when traffic stops unexpectedly. A professional truck driver must also be more alert than the automobile driver; you need more room to stop. It's important to be alert and be prepared for unexpected occurrences.

Always maintain a **4- to 6-second following distance** (depending on speed and truck size) between yourself and the vehicle ahead of you on dry roads. Gauge your following distance by identifying a fixed object on or near the roadway such as a sign, white line, overpass, etc. Count the number of seconds that it takes you to reach that spot after the vehicle ahead of you passes the same location. Count by using one-thousand one, one-thousand two, etc. As a driver of a truck, you will need more than 137 extra feet (42 meters) to stop without hitting the automobile. Remember that there is a lag time with a tractor-trailer's brake activation compared to an automobile.

In urban or congested areas, it is hard to maintain a 4- to 6-second following distance because traffic keeps filling in the space in front of you. **Go slightly slower than the flow of traffic** so that when cars do cut into your open space, they are moving faster than you and are pulling away from you. Never tailgate! Doing so may cause a serious accident. Tailgating also makes other motorists very nervous and gives your profession a negative image.

Stopping distance varies with speed. It is the total distance required to stop from the time you recognize the need for action until the truck comes to a full stop. It is affected by weather, temperature, tire condition and road type. The higher the speed, the greater the stopping distance needed.

Time Management

Do your best to manage your own time effectively so you are not running late. When delays beyond your control occur, you need to manage the situation the best you can at that point. If possible, make a phone call and adjust your next appointment so that you are not running late. If you cannot rearrange your schedule, you need to take the view that you will do your best, but you can only get there as quickly as safe driving allows. That means you are not going to waste any time, but you cannot drive faster or take any unnecessary risks to get to your appointment.

Intersections and Caution Lights

A high percentage of collisions occur at intersections where traffic is crossing, slowing, stopping, turning, etc. Intersections should always be an area of special caution for drivers.

Be prepared for the unexpected and don't assume that the car ahead of you will proceed through an amber light. If the light ahead is red, but turns green as you approach, don't assume that the stopped line of traffic will be moving at your speed by the time you reach the intersection.

There is a real aversion to losing momentum in many drivers of larger trucks. This is understandable since it takes time to build up to highway speeds once you slow down or stop. However, you must not let this be a factor in your driving decisions. When you spot a potentially hazardous problem that would call for slowing down and preparing to stop, don't let a reluctance to lose momentum and go through all the gears again prevent you from driving defensively.

Construction Zones

Again, be prepared for the unexpected. Construction equipment may unexpectedly pull onto the roadway, or a flag person may be posted to stop traffic. Dust or mud may be an additional hazard, as well as other motorists that are just plain confused. Construction on a freeway or interstate highway system is particularly dangerous and deadly. When you are in a construction zone, obey the posted speed limits and be especially alert for stopped traffic. Do not exceed the posted speed limit in a construction zone even if the other traffic is exceeding the limit.

When approaching a construction area where traffic must merge to one or two lanes, expect that other traffic will be cutting in front of you. Be alert for vehicles driving on the shoulder to get around you and other traffic. Be on the alert for equipment that may cross the road and watch for flaggers. Always be prepared to stop, even if the flagger is displaying the "slow" side of the sign.

Fatigue

Manage your time and sleep so that you have had enough **rest** prior to getting behind the wheel. If you find yourself getting drowsy while you are at the wheel, pull off at the first available safe location. Once you have stopped, you can rest for a while, go for a walk, or get a beverage.

When you are planning to pull over to get some rest, do not pull off on the shoulder of the road. Too often, other drivers that are drowsy will drift onto the shoulder and run into the rear of your truck. This is very often a fatal accident for the person that hits you. In poor weather or at night, people will not always realize that you are stopped and may drive toward your rear taillights thinking that they are following you. By the time they realize you are stopped, it is often too late.

Never pull over and stop on the shoulder of the exit ramp. Traffic is exiting at highway speeds and may run into you at a dangerous speed. If possible, find a well-lit and secure truck stop or another area where you personally are not susceptible to danger and you are not likely to be hit by moving traffic. NEVER stop on the shoulder of the road.