

14 Defensive Driving Techniques For Commercial Motor Vehicle Drivers

As a professional driver, you are often called upon to compensate for the bad driving behaviors of other drivers who share the roadways with you. You must always be sharply focused on the driving task and react in a professional manner to changing traffic patterns and situations. Drive as if your life and the lives of others depend on it. **THEY DO.**

- 1 Always wear your seat belt.** Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of occupational fatalities in the U.S. Truck drivers account for nearly half of those deaths. As a commercial vehicle driver, you are at increased risk for injury and/or death if you do not use a seat belt on every trip. Seat belt use is the most effective way to save lives and reduce injuries in crashes. So always buckle up.
- 2 Be aware of driving conditions.** As a professional driver, you must be prepared for changing weather conditions and traffic congestion, all while remaining diligent while driving. In inclement weather or any adverse driving conditions, slow down. On snow-packed roads, reduce your speed by more than half. On icy or slick roads, reduce your speed even more. If it is no longer safe to drive due to the weather, pull off the road into a safe location.
- 3 Don't speed.** Speeding is one of the most prevalent factors contributing to traffic crashes today. Respect laws and other drivers and demonstrate a culture of safety by not speeding.
- 4 Do not fixate on non-driving objects.** Keep your eyes on the road. Restrict glances away from the roadway to one second or less. Keep your focus on the potential driving hazards you may encounter.
- 5 You can't fight fatigue.** Even the best drivers battle fatigue issues. If you are exhibiting signs of fatigue, pull off the road into a safe location and get the rest your body needs. A high number of single vehicle rollovers are attributed to drivers falling asleep at the wheel. There is no substitute for quality sleep.
- 6 Search as you drive.** Observe the roadway in front, the sides and rear of your vehicle. Look for all sources of potential moving and fixed hazards. Watch for brake lights; they may signal hazards ahead. Anticipate possible risks and where interactions with traffic will occur.
- 7 Be careful when backing.** As a professional driver, you should always observe the GOAL (Get Out And Look) when backing. Never back your vehicle until you are certain your path is clear of all persons and obstacles. Check your mirrors often when backing.
- 8 Maintain your lane of travel.** Due to the width and length of your vehicle, it is important to maintain your lane of travel at all times. Search far enough ahead on the roadway to determine necessary lane changes and exits. Always signal your intention to change lanes. Allow a four-second following distance at all times. In inclement weather, following distances should at least be doubled.
- 9 Be cognizant of the "No Zones."** Remember the "No Zones," which are the locations where you are unable to see vehicles or other hazards to the front, right, left and rear of your vehicle. Check your side mirrors often for vehicles entering these areas and be aware of vehicles that may be tailgating. As a professional driver, you may have to compensate for other drivers' bad driving behaviors.
- 10 Enter curves slowly.** Slow down when approaching curves in the road. Keep in mind the capabilities of your vehicle and the load you are transporting. When entering a curve, be aware of speed limits and do not place yourself or your vehicle in a dangerous situation. Load shifts can result in serious consequences.
- 11 Plan your route before you leave.** Program your GPS before you start your trip. Removing one or both hands from the wheel while driving to enter information into a GPS device can be just as dangerous, if not more so, as texting while driving.
- 12 Turn your cell phone off while driving.** Focus your attention on the driving task at hand. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs) prohibit texting or the use of a hand-held electronic device while operating a commercial motor vehicle. (49 Code of Federal Regulations (CFRs) 392.80 and 392.82)
- 13 Avoid distractions while driving.** Avoid all three types of driving distractions. (1) Manual: Distractions that take one or both hands off the steering wheel while driving. Examples include eating, drinking, changing radio stations, grooming. (2) Visual: Distractions that take your eyes off the road. Examples include looking at billboards, looking at non-driving objects, talking and texting on hand-held electronic devices. (3) Cognitive: Distractions that take a drivers mind or mental attention away from the driving task. Examples include anger, anxiety, fatigue, pain and daydreaming. Keep your focus on the potential driving hazards you may encounter.
- 14 Medications may affect your driving abilities.** Both prescription and over-the-counter medications may affect your ability to operate your commercial motor vehicle safely. Know the side effects of your medications. Refer to warning labels and obey the listed restrictions. The use of amphetamines or methamphetamines while driving a commercial motor vehicle without a prescription from a licensed physician is prohibited.