



# SAFETY TIPS

Volume 24

## Maintain a Safe Following Distance

Unexpected hazards can appear at any time. They require drivers to increase their following distance and prepare for slowed or stopped traffic. Identifying such unexpected highway hazards involves more than just seeing them. Drivers must be able to anticipate any potential hazards, recognize a hazard when it occurs, understand how the hazard affects the driving situation and respond appropriately to prevent a possible collision. Roadway hazards can change from one moment to the next so drivers must continually anticipate and be prepared to react correctly and in time.

The best way a driver can anticipate and be prepared for unexpected hazards on the roadway is to remember to always visually examine and assess the roadway ahead and all around other vehicles.

Follow these tips for proper visual examination and assessment:

1. Visually scan the horizon on the road ahead of you as far as you can see. Scanning involves moving your eyes in a regular pattern, sweeping over the entire scene. Concentrate on what is ahead, especially looking at the space where your vehicle will be 15 seconds from now, ½

mile from now and one mile from now. Your primary purpose in the visual scan is to observe other vehicles and objects as they relate to your expected travel path. Glance quickly from your anticipated travel path to other areas and then back again.

2. Practice "what if". *What if* the traffic you cannot see beyond the curve is stopped or backed up? *What if* the traffic you cannot see just beyond the crest of that hill is stopped or backed up? *What if* the overpass in front of you is hiding stopped or backed up traffic? *What if* that truck in front of you that is blocking your vision is tailgating and the driver does not see traffic stopped in front of him? These are dangerous areas and situations that frequently have major collisions because approaching drivers cannot see the hazard and do not anticipate the potential of a hazard. Therefore they cannot correctly maneuver or stop in time to avoid a collision.

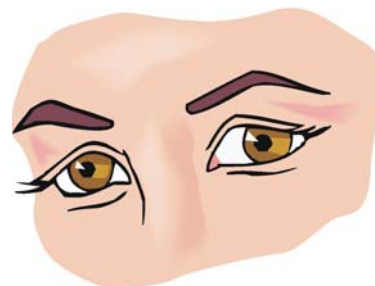
3. Watch both the vehicles immediately in front of you and those farther ahead to get the

complete picture. Scan for vehicles that are slowing down or making quick stops or lane changes, and continue to maintain a safe following distance. *Four seconds is the minimum safe following distance for a motorcoach or school bus.* If you see brake lights ahead, act immediately to increase your following distance and adjust your speed according to conditions. If your safe following distance is taken away by traffic, momentarily slow down to regain that space. Turn off your cruise control and cover the brake pedal with your foot to decrease your reaction time.

4. Look at the side of the road, other lanes of traffic and any upcoming intersections or driveways for hazards.

5. Frequently glance to the sides for potential problems next to you.

6. Keep your eyes moving in a continuous scan rather than focusing on one object in a fixed stare. A fixed stare will reduce your peripheral vision. Your eyes should not spend more than a second or two on any one object before continuing to scan. Your peripheral vision gives you early warning signs of approaching danger from the sides.



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## **Watch for Potential Hazards**

Anticipate and watch for the following hazardous situations which can be potential hazards:

- Traffic congestion
- Construction sites
- Roadway construction zones
- Brake lights on vehicles in front of you
- Flashing headlights or taillight in front of you
- A hesitant or distracted driver on the road in front of or near you
- A highway merging ramp
- An intersection of any kind
- Vehicles parked along the roadway
- A vehicle approaching or in the lane in front of you that is swerving back and forth
- A recent accident scene
- Bicyclist or other non-motorized vehicles on or near the roadway
- Military convoys or funeral processions which have the right of way at all intersections if their headlights are turned on
- Children playing near or on the roadway
- School buses
- School zones
- Pedestrian crossings
- Shopping centers
- Tourist centers
- Highway / rail grade crossings
- Vehicles backing or turning onto the roadway ahead
- Oncoming vehicles passing other vehicles
- Other vehicles passing your vehicle
- Animals on or near the roadway or animal warning signs
- Roadway curves
- Road crest on a hill that you cannot see beyond
- Narrow bridge ahead signs
- A bridge, overpass, tunnel or other obstruction that you cannot see beyond
- Roadway debris of any kind
- Adverse weather conditions

This list of potential hazards is by no means all-inclusive. Any situation that could cause you or another motorist to prepare for or to take evasive action should be considered a potential roadway hazard. Always stay alert; maintain a safe following distance; continuously scan ahead, all around your vehicle and the horizon; and drive defensively.

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### *Safe Following Distance* (Continued from page 1)

7. Check your mirrors every 5 – 8 seconds for potential problems. Events occurring to the side and rear of your vehicle can quickly become a collision. Glance at the mirrors to get a split second snapshot of what is present and past and then quickly return your focus to the front of your vehicle.
8. Eliminate vision barriers by establishing or increasing your safe following distance. Stay far enough behind other vehicles to obtain the visibility required to evaluate, recognize and react to any hazard.
9. Quickly check dashboard gauges and the speedometer.
10. Avoid distractions such as eating, map reading, cellular communications, conversations with passengers, etc. that will take your focus off your visual scanning process.
11. Be extra cautious regarding possible hazards in your blind spots. Although you cannot see what is happening in these areas, you can watch for other vehicles or potential hazards that may be moving into these blind spots. Always check blind spots. Momentarily slowing down and leaning forward or backward in your seat can help bring objects in the blind spots into view.
12. Constantly recheck the roadway in front of you and all around your vehicle. Repeatedly scan distant points ahead, the roadway in front of you, intermediate points in between, the sides of your vehicle and your mirrors.
13. Be alert and fully aware of the traffic situations around you at all times. Certain situations are danger signs that should automatically alert you to anticipate possible trouble before it happens. This will permit you to avoid problems by making advanced maneuvers, such as slowing down, covering the brake and increasing following distance.