

TOOLBOX TALKS

Defensive Driving

Great Britain has one of the best road safety records in Europe and the world. Despite massive increases in traffic over the last few decades, the number of people killed on our roads has fallen from around 5,500 per year in the mid-1980s to well under 1,754 in 2012. However, this still means that five people die on Britain's roads every day.

According to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA, it is estimated that the total number of road casualties in Great Britain is between 660,000 and 880,000 per year, with approximately 80,000 people who are seriously injured.

Health and Safety Legislation applies to on-the road activity as it does to all work activities and the risks to drivers must be assessed.

Administrative controls such as risk assessments, Driver Declarations and ensuring all drivers receive a copy of the Driver's Manual are only part of the solution for ensuring a safer mobile workforce.

Ultimately drivers must take responsibility for ensuring they are not putting themselves in potentially hazardous situations by applying the principals of defensive driving to prevent accidents despite the actions of other drivers or the presence of adverse climatic conditions.

Defensive Driving

Remember the following techniques of defensive driving may also be applied when driving private vehicles to reduce your risk of an accident. Defensive driving involves the following three strategies.

THINK

- ✓ See the hazard
- ✓ Understand the defence
- ✓ Act to a given situation within a safe time period

See the Hazard

A defensive driver must be able to accurately predict the outcome of traffic situations in order to apply the defensive driving technique in time to prevent an accident.

When driving think about what may happen as far ahead of reaching a situation as possible. Never assume that a condition will have passed before you approach it.

Anticipate and expect the unexpected. An example is - a car is parked on the near side of the road as you approach; 'is the vehicle driver's side door about to open? Will pedestrians (particularly small children) suddenly cross from in front? Is there something in front of the vehicle that you cannot see, that has caused the vehicle to stop there?'

Understand the Defence

There are specific ways to handle most situations. You should review these situations in your mind so that you can act quickly in time to prevent an accident. An example of this may be: You are approaching a cross-road on a wet slippery road. The traffic light has been green for some time – if it changes colour, will you have time to stop?

You note vehicles are waiting for the light to go green to turn in front of you. Defensive driving involves anticipating the traffic light will change and allowing a greater stopping distance due to the wet road surface.

Act in Time

Never assume the condition will change or clear. The sooner you act the more time you will have to avoid an accident.

The ability to drive defensively is not a natural instinct, especially with younger, newly qualified drivers. Drivers with years of experience may also feel that they do not need this advice. This is when complacency and brashness creep in and accidents occur.

In attempting to constantly improve our skills, train yourself to always expect the unexpected and drive with the constant approach of **"what if"**.

Blind Spots

A blind spot in a vehicle is an area around the vehicle that cannot be directly observed by the driver while at the controls, under existing circumstances. Blind spots exist in a wide range of vehicles and may occur in the front of the driver when the A-pillar (also called the windshield pillar), side-view mirror, and interior rear-view mirror block a driver's view of the road. Behind the driver, there are additional pillars, headrests, passengers, and cargo that may also reduce visibility.

Many accidents occur due to drivers failing to check the blind spot. Although mirrors allow a driver to see a wide angle of observation behind them there are areas that cannot be observed in the mirrors. These blind spot areas can easily hide a cyclist or another vehicle.

Be mindful that when moving off, changing lanes and exiting junctions you take the time to check potential 'blind spots' in order to complete the manoeuvre safely.

Remember **MY CAR**

Motivation: Perhaps the most important element in defensive driving, you have to be motivated to "not want to have an accident".

Yield: Be prepared to make allowances for the behaviour of other road users, even those whose driving behaviour itself is irresponsible. If necessary, yield to them to avoid an accident. Learn to accept the irritations of traffic and the behaviour of other drivers as just part of normal driving.

Concentration: The greatest problem that confronts drivers is the speed with which hazardous situations arise. The earlier you spot the hazard the more chance you have to use your driving skills to prevent an accident occurring. By developing skills of concentration, you'll buy yourself vital seconds.

Assessment: Using your Personal Driving Skills, a combination of vehicle handling and your competence in assessing situations, decide the best course of action to minimize risk.

Road Conditions: Always adjust your driving accordingly and be sensitive to the special hazards presented by abnormal, unusual or changing conditions in:

- Weather/ Visibility
- Traffic Situations/Road Surfaces
- Mechanical operation of your vehicle
- Your physical fitness and state of mind

Above all, allowing yourself the valuable time to consider all the elements of **MY CAR** as you are driving. Too many accidents are caused by drivers simply rushing to get from A to B. Remember the final key foundation of:

Safety First - Take Time to do it Safely

By putting your safety first through defensive driving, you will develop an attitude of confidence that accidents are preventable, which will be reflected in your own performance and peace of mind.

References

Toolbox Talks Dealing with Road Rage and Safety First

Defensive Driving – Questions

Q1. What is a 'blind spot'?

A

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Q2. Give two examples of hazards/conditions that you should be aware of when driving?

A1

A2

Q3. What Does MY CAR stand for?

M

Y

C

A

R

Q4. What three strategies should you use when driving defensively?

A1

A2

A3

Q5. According to RoSPA approximately how many people are seriously injured on Britain's roads each year?

A

Employee Name:

Employee Number:

Manager's Name:

Date: