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Defensive Driving Adverse Conditions

A defensive driver is prepared with an appropriate reaction to handle any possible hazard that may confront him or her when a possible hazard develops.

Below are six conditions that create hazards and some tips to avoid them.

1. Light

Night

- Vision - Your vision is reduced at night. Slowing down is the best defensive driving action to prevent an accident.
- Glare - Direct light into a driver's eye from sunlight, reflections or vehicle headlights can reduce vision for a short time. Use sunglasses or visors and avoiding looking directly into an oncoming vehicle's headlights.

Headlights

Headlights will illuminate the roadway for some distance, but it is important to manage your speed to keep your stopping distance within your sight distance. Keeping your headlights clean and in proper adjustment is important. Use high beams when appropriate and keep interior lights to a minimum.

2. Weather

Precipitation

Traction is compromised with rain, sleet and snow. Reducing speed, increasing following distance and proper use of wipers and defrosters all assist the driver. Hydroplaning is a serious danger and can occur even at slow speeds. Regain control by releasing the accelerator. Wet brakes can cause loss of braking power, lockups or pulling to one side.

Avoid driving through deep water but if you do immediately test the brakes and allow them to dry before proceeding to drive.

Visibility

Heavy rain, snow and fog will impair your visibility. Avoid driving in these conditions as much as possible.

Ice

Bridges and overpasses are susceptible to icing before the roadway will freeze. Melting ice is more slippery than ice that is not wet. Reducing speed is the best defensive technique for icy conditions.

3. Road

Skid Control

Over-braking, over-steering, over-accelerating or driving too fast can result in a driver losing grip of the road. All of these situations occur because the driver didn't recognize the hazards present. Prior to driving, take note of any weather hazards and think about how they will affect the road conditions.



Knowing your business matters.

Running off the road

Avoid swerving back onto the roadway if you run off it. Over-steering back toward the roadway can cause a rollover or steering into opposing traffic. Instead, release the accelerator to slow your speed and ease back onto the roadway.

Specific locations: mountains, curves, highways, etc...

Uphill and downhill grades require careful gear changing and braking management. Drivers should slow down prior to entering a curve to avoid skids. Don't ever exceed the posted speed limit for a curve.

4. Traffic

Sharing the roadway

Adequate following distance is crucial to avoid rear end collisions. Allow a four second interval between you and the vehicle ahead. This allows for enough time to react to any hazards that you encounter. Allow faster vehicles to pass in the left lane. Shoulder check when making lane changes and right hand turns to check the blind spot.

Seeing ahead

Look well ahead to see hazards that occur. Look 12-15 seconds ahead and shift that focus inward to see hazards close in then, shift to each side and begin the process over. Check your mirrors every five to eight seconds to see any hazards around you.

Communication

Communicating your presence and intentions are vital to let other drivers and road users know what you are going to do. Headlights, hazard lights, signal lights, brake lights, and horn allow you to communicate. Communicate early to allow others to react in time.

5. Vehicle Condition

Maintenance

Your inspection program should identify all maintenance issues with your vehicle. Special attention should be given to tires and brakes. Regular maintenance should be performed on your vehicle to ensure that mechanical breakdown does not occur, especially ones that can cause accidents.

Tire pressure

Tire pressure is the most important factor to keep your vehicle on the road. Over or under inflated tires reduce stability, traction and fuel efficiency. Check your user manual for the proper tire pressure for your vehicle and ensure this pressure is maintained at all times.

6. Driver Condition

The majority of accidents are caused by driver error. The mental and physical state of a driver determines whether errors are made. Alcohol and drugs have an obvious effect on mental state but fatigue and distractions also affect the driver's ability to concentrate on the driving tasks. Zero tolerance of alcohol and drugs should be implemented. To combat fatigue, driving shifts should be limited and drivers should be counseled on the affects of fatigue on driving. Distractions should be dealt with by implementing policies on cell phone use, stereo use and prohibiting riders in any company vehicle.

Awareness is one of the key components of defensive driving. Educating your drivers on the hazards is a good way to promote awareness.

Exercise:

Scenario: Analyze what your defensive driving techniques are under the following scenarios:

1. Your work shift begins:
 - a. at 6 am and you didn't sleep well.
 - b. during a heavy snowstorm.
 - c. during a heavy rainstorm.
 - d. during fog.
2. During your shift, inclement weather strikes.
3. Road conditions dictate that you must travel through a city in rush hour rather than around the city.
4. One of your headlights burns out prior to the end of your shift.
5. One tire loses some of its pressure.

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