

# Defensive driving

For a truck driver, doing the job means long hours and many miles on the road. And it can be dangerous work. We want to help make sure your drivers practice the best safety measures. We've put together these tips to help.

We've all been taught the best drivers are defensive drivers. That means searching the road ahead for hazardous conditions or changing driving conditions, preparing for mistakes by other drivers or pedestrians, and checking the sides and rear for passing or approaching vehicles. By keeping an eye out and seeing problems early, a driver has the time to react as needed to avoid an unsafe situation. But paying attention means avoiding some common distractions:

- Cell phones and other communication devices
- In-cab telematics
- Eating and drinking
- Smoking
- Adjusting radios, climate, and other controls

## PUTTING THE VEHICLE IN MOTION

Moving forward, backward, and steering left or right from a stopped position can create unexpected hazards. Before putting the vehicle in motion, drivers should:

- Adjust mirrors
- Check for broken mirrors and loose mountings
- Make sure horn, back-up warning signal, tail lights, brake lights, and turn signals are all functioning
- Walk around and look underneath vehicle for safe clearances
- Check that cargo loads are secured
- Move vehicle immediately after safety checks
- Check blind spots

## PASSING

Safe passing maneuvers require well-developed skills and judgment. Here are some tips:

- Make certain no one is passing you before you attempt to pass
- Signal your intention to pass
- Assume approaching vehicles will not see you

## TURNING

Recognize the hazards created by turning and follow proper procedures to minimize them. For right turns, drivers should:

- Move to the right lane well in advance of the intersection
- Wait for other vehicles to clear and then turn slowly
- Avoid improper tracking so the vehicle or trailer will not ride up onto the curb or into stationary objects

## FOR LEFT TURNS, DRIVERS SHOULD:

- Watch for drivers who may misinterpret the intended turn
- Avoid turning until there is enough time for the rear of vehicle to clear the intersection
- Be aware that opposing drivers may not see you
- Assume approaching vehicles will not see you



## INTERSECTIONS

Trucks take more time to cross and clear intersections than automobiles. That's why drivers should:

- Install reflectors and reflective tape
- Keep sides of vehicle clean and marker lights operational
- Avoid turning until there is enough time for the rear of vehicle to clear the intersection

## LANE USE AND LANE CHANGING

Lane use and lane changing accidents primarily involve sideswipes and rear-end collisions. Unnecessary lane changes can increase the potential for an accident and should be kept to a minimum. To avoid accidents, drivers should:

- Maintain safe following distances
- Scan ahead to see what's approaching
- Flash brake lights to alert drivers of trouble ahead
- Check blind spots before attempting to change lanes

## DOWNGRADES

Brake failure is the main reason for losing control on downgrades. To avoid it, drivers should:

- Inspect, adjust, and replace brake components
- Use a descending gear that requires only light brake pressure—10 psi—to slow speed
- Never use the hand lever to apply trailer brakes

## ADVERSE DRIVING CONDITIONS

Failure to adjust to adverse conditions, reduced traction, and poor visibility is a major cause of accidents. During bad weather, drivers should:

- Keep tire chains available
- Increase following distances
- Get off the road and wait for conditions to improve

## EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT AND PROCEDURES

Emergency situations require proper equipment and training on their use. If an emergency occurs, drivers should:

- Turn on emergency flashers immediately if you're stalled and stopped on the roadway
- Turn on emergency flashers immediately and try to coast onto the shoulder if the truck stalls while driving
- Carefully set up reflective triangles

## ACCIDENTS INVOLVING PEDESTRIANS

Most pedestrian accidents occur when a person walks onto a roadway and into the path of an approaching vehicle. To avoid accidents involving pedestrians, drivers should:

- Watch for and anticipate pedestrians crossing—especially at night
- Assume pedestrians will not give the right-of-way

These are just some of the tips that can help keep your drivers safe on the road. For more information, check out the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's website at [fmcsa.dot.gov](http://fmcsa.dot.gov).

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