

Driving tips offered by the nation's truckers

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Many motorists express concern about driving near a truck because of its size. But sharing the road with a truck can be safe, easy and enjoyable if a few helpful rules are observed.

During National Transportation Week May 15-21, the American Trucking Associations offers these safe driving suggestions for motorists. They come from the safest drivers on the road, the nation's professional truck drivers.

- Drive defensively. Drive to prevent accidents in spite of hazardous driving by others or unsafe road conditions. Commit no driving errors yourself. Adjust your speed to road, traffic and weather conditions. Guard against other drivers' mistakes.

- Stopping and tailgating. In general, trucks take slightly longer to stop because of their size and weight. However, that's not always true. At high speeds or on wet roads, trucks may stop faster because of better traction and stability. Also, with a better view of the road ahead, truck drivers can often spot hazards and apply their brakes sooner than motorists.

Maintain a safe following distance. Do not tailgate regardless of what vehicle is ahead. A following distance of two seconds, or one car length for each ten miles per hour of speed, will allow time to apply brakes and slow to a safe stop. For example, a motorist should maintain a distance of six car lengths behind a vehicle if both are traveling at 60mph.

Following time is determined by noting when the rear of the vehicle ahead passes an object along the highway and counting slowly until the front of your vehicle reaches the same point. When following a truck, in particular, a long following distance permits a better view of the road ahead and allows you to beware of potential dangers.

If you are ahead of another vehicle, keep an eye on it in your mirrors. If it gets too close, slow down and let it pass, or, if safety permits, speed up to increase the distance.

Many accidents occur when the vehicle ahead stops

without warning the vehicle behind. Begin slowing well in advance to avoid panic stops by cars or trucks behind you. Make sure your brake lights are in good working order.

- Passing. Many motorists are somewhat timid about passing trucks because of their size. For the most part, the rules apply whether passing a car or a truck.

Check traffic front and rear. Don't pull out if you are being overtaken by faster traffic or if there is oncoming traffic in the passing lane. When you move into the passing lane, give a short horn blast. At night, flick your bright lights to let the driver ahead know you are passing. As you pass, keep as far left as possible to avoid sideswiping and to reduce wind turbulence between vehicles. After completing the pass, don't pull back into the traffic lane until you can see the front of the vehicle in your rear-view mirror. When overtaking a truck in three or more lanes of traffic, pass to the left. The truck driver has better visibility on that side.

When you are being passed, keep your speed constant, or slow down a little if the vehicle is passing slowly. After the vehicle has passed, establish and maintain a safe following distance.

If another vehicle is approaching in your lane, head for the right shoulder, blow your horn and flash your lights, to attract his attention and get him to return to his

own lane. Never try to pass him on the left. If he returns to his lane and there is an accident, you will be at fault. Truck drivers are forbidden by law to help motorists pass. However, if you blink your lights to indicate you are going to pass, the truck driver will keep to his right and make it easier. If the driver flicks his lights after you have passed, he is simply telling you it's safe to pull back into the lane in front of him.

- Turning. Many motorists do not realize that as a truck driver approaches an intersection to make a right turn, he may move slightly to the left to avoid running the trailer up onto the curb. As the truck moves left, a temporary lane is created to his right. Seeing that lane, an impatient driver might move up on the right of the truck, leaving himself vulnerable when the truck swings into its right turn.

To avoid this type of accident, motorists should always pay close attention to truck turn signals. Never pass on the right at an intersection, and never assume that when a truck moves to the left it will turn left or continue straight.

Failure to yield right-of-way on turns or at intersections is another common cause of traffic accidents. A driver who is turning left must yield to oncoming vehicles. Motorists quite often turn in front of a truck in the mistaken belief that the

truck is approaching more slowly than its actual speed. It's safer to wait until the truck passes.

- Blind spots and backing accidents. Because most large trucks do not have rear windows, the driver must depend on side mirrors to see what is behind him. As a result, there is a "blind spot" extending 12 to 15 feet directly behind a truck.

Often, when a truck begins to back from the roadway into a loading area, he temporarily blocks the roadway. If a motorist tries to pass close behind the truck, he enters the driver's "blind spot" and an accident can occur. The easiest way to avoid an accident is never to cross behind a truck which is attempting to back up unless the driver waves you through.

If you stop behind a truck, keep your vehicle slightly to the left of your lane so you won't be in his blind zone. That way, if he's planning to back up, he'll see you in his side mirror.

When stopping behind a

truck on an upgrade, always leave at least one car's length between you and the rear of the truck to avoid a "roll back" accident. A truck usually rolls backwards a few feet when its driver takes his foot off the brake and engages the clutch.

- Emergency Use of Citizens Band Radios. Nowadays, nearly all truck drivers and many motorists and highway patrolmen has CB radios in their vehicles. Use your radio wisely and sparingly. Don't fill the airwaves with chatter. If you need assistance or want to report an accident, turn to Channel 9, the recognized emergency channel.

When requesting assistance for yourself or someone else, speak slowly and clearly into the transmitter. Identify the location where help is needed and the type of assistance required. Road mile markers make excellent points of reference for someone else to find you or the accident you are reporting.

Be as brief as possible when transmitting word of an accident, but not so brief as to cause confusion. Take a "strictly business" attitude when using Channel 9. It's your best assurance of time-saving communications.

If you need help and don't have a CB radio, pull as far off the road as possible and display a white cloth from the radio antenna or from an unrolled window as a signal of distress. Remain in your car. Most truck drivers will radio ahead on their CBs for help. Usually they won't stop unless there has been an accident or fire, but you can be assured help will soon be on its way.

To get directions when you don't have a CB, stop at a truckstop. You're sure to find a driver who has come from the area in which you are headed. He'll be happy to advise you.

Keeping these points in mind should make sharing the road with a truck - or with any vehicle - easier, safer and more enjoyable.

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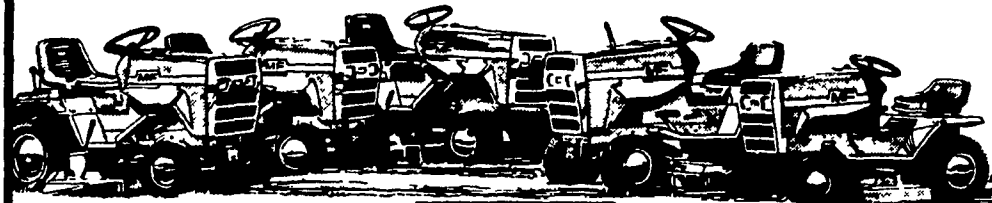
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