

Risk Control Bulletin

Avoiding Front- and Rear-end Vehicle Incidents

RISK CONTROL



There are three basic defensive driving skills which can be used on and off the job to help prevent front- and rear-end vehicle incidents.

Rear-end collisions, those in which your vehicle is struck from behind, can be avoided through gradual stops. There are countless reports of vehicle incidents which reflect that the incident was caused by a sudden stop at an intersection, grade crossing, passenger stops, and in preparation for making turns. If you make sudden and/or unexpected stops, the person operating a vehicle behind you may not have sufficient reaction and stopping distances to prevent a vehicle incident. There are numerous vehicle incidents which report that while the first vehicle operator behind another was able to jam on the brakes and stop, the third and sometimes even the fourth vehicle were not able to stop in time to prevent an incident.

The second basic defensive driving skill is scanning ahead. By simply watching the traffic situation, including moving vehicles, parked vehicles which could potentially be pulled out from their spaces, and pedestrian activity, you can anticipate the need to adjust your driving speed or even the need to stop.

The third defensive driving skill and perhaps the most frequently overlooked method of preventing front- and rear-end vehicle incidents is that of safe following distances. The actual safe following distance will depend of the weight of your vehicle. A fully loaded contractor's van or straight truck weighs far more than a basic private passenger vehicle and would, therefore, need greater following distances. The recommended safe following distance for private passenger vehicles is three seconds. Consequently, your following distance should be adjusted upwards to 4, 5 or even 6 seconds, depending on the weight of your vehicle and the load it is carrying.

Following distances need to be increased during inclement weather or if dangerous driving conditions exist. All too many vehicle incident reports reflect the driver's statement that the vehicle slid on wet pavement.

To determine if you have established the minimum safe following distance, pick out a fixed object such as a speed limit sign or light pole. When the vehicle ahead of you passes that marker, begin counting the seconds until your vehicle is in line with the marker. Adjust your following distance accordingly. Practice performing the test so that you can better judge safe following distances under various speed limits and driving conditions.

Remember, a defensive driver will do everything that can be done to reasonably prevent a vehicle incident. Practice the basic skills of gradual stops, scanning ahead, and safe following distances, and you can help protect yourself from injuries, prevent injuring others, minimize vehicle and operational downtime, as well as minimize the extra expenses associated with vehicle incidents and increased insurance costs incurred by your organization.