

DRIVING SAFETY: THE BASICS

COURSE OUTLINE

- **We do so much driving that it's easy to forget how dangerous it can be.**
 - Road accidents claim more than two million lives worldwide, and result in millions more serious injuries, every year.
 - Fortunately, most accidents can be prevented.
- **You can avoid trouble on the road if you approach your driving with...**
 - The right skills.
 - A well-maintained vehicle.
 - The right attitude.
- **Keeping your car in good mechanical condition is key to preventing trouble on the road.**
 - Getting annual state inspections and following the service schedule recommended by the manufacturer will help with this.
- **Tires keep your vehicle secure on the road.**
 - Check their condition.
 - Keep them at their proper pressure, and replace them as needed.
 - Put a tire pressure gauge in your glove box if you haven't already got one.
- **Windshield wipers keep your windshield clean and help you to see in bad weather.**
 - Make sure the blades are in good shape and clear your windshield effectively.
 - Remember to keep the washer fluid topped off, too.
- **Brakes enable you to control your speed and stop your vehicle.**
 - If you notice any unusual noise or vibration when braking, or have difficulty stopping, get your brakes checked immediately... and repaired if necessary.
- **All vehicles should have basic "emergency supplies" on board.**
 - Unless you have "run-flats", this starts with a properly inflated spare tire, a tire iron and a jack.

- **Put together a kit that includes...**
 - A snow brush and ice scraper.
 - Accident warning indicators, such as flares or a flashing light.
 - Jumper cables.
 - An emergency blanket or two.
 - A small shovel.
 - A flashlight.
- **Before you set out, you need to adjust your vehicle for comfort and safety.**
 - Position your seat for good back support.
 - Be sure that your feet can easily reach the pedals, and operate them.
 - Adjust your rear and side view mirrors to minimize "blind spots".
- **If you're driving a rental or company vehicle that you aren't used to, take some time to locate the important controls and figure out how they work.**
 - Familiarize yourself with the car's handling.
 - Try out the steering.
 - See how much "stopping distance" you need at various speeds.
 - Remember, larger vehicles and those with heavy loads require more stopping distance.
- **If you are driving a gasoline-powered vehicle, stop in at the gas station and "fill 'er up".**
 - Check the oil and the tire pressure, too.
- **If you have an electric vehicle...**
 - Check the tire pressure.
 - Make sure your battery has an adequate charge.
 - The batteries in these vehicles are particularly sensitive to heat and cold, so you should check the coolant levels as well.
- **If you're under the influence of drugs or alcohol, you're not ready to drive safely.**
 - Even one drink can slow your reflexes and impair your judgment.
 - Drugs do the same.
 - More than half of all fatal accidents involve drugs or alcohol.
- **You're also not ready if you're not wearing your seat belt.**
 - Being in an accident at 30 mph without a seat belt is like hitting the ground after falling off a three-story building.
 - Wearing a seat belt doubles your chances of surviving any crash.

- **Road signs help you avoid problems by warning you of the conditions ahead.**
 - You will know what to expect and can plan for it.
- **Pay attention to the posted speed limits.**
 - They take the road's specific conditions, visibility and traffic patterns into account.
 - Going any faster just isn't safe.
- **The faster you go, the less time you have to react and the more space you need to stop.**
 - That's a dangerous combination.
- **When you're in traffic, create a "safety cushion" of space between yourself and the vehicles around you.**
 - This will let you maneuver safely in an emergency.
- **Begin by establishing the "following distance" between you and the car ahead.**
 - Watch the car in front of you.
 - When it passes a landmark like a tree or telephone pole, count how many seconds it takes before you reach that same point.
 - If it's less than three seconds, you're too close.
- **You can adjust your following distance to maintain safety anytime you run into a challenging condition.**
 - In heavy traffic, add another second to the following distance.
 - If it's raining or snowing, add two more seconds.
- **If another driver cuts in front of you, slow down until you once again have a safe distance between yourself and that vehicle.**
- **You also need to allow plenty of "side space" in your safety cushion.**
 - Staying in the center of your lane will help.
 - Check your mirrors regularly to keep track of traffic behind you as well.
- **When you want to pass another vehicle...**
 - Make sure it's safe and legal to pass.
 - Look at the lines in the middle of the road... if they're solid, it means that you can't see far enough to pass safely, so don't try.
 - If you see a sign that says "DO NOT PASS", don't pass! (the sign is there for a reason).

- **When you get to where you can pass, remember to "look before you leap."**
 - Check the road ahead and behind to make sure there's enough room.
 - Before you pull out, use your turn signal to tell other drivers that you intend to pass.
- **When you pass, pass quickly.**
 - Don't linger in the other driver's blind spot.
 - Remember, if you can't see the other driver in their side mirror, they can't see you either.
- **Don't "cut off" the vehicle that you're passing by merging back into their lane too soon.**
 - Wait until you can see both of their headlights in your rearview mirror... then signal and pull back in.
- **Sharing the road with cars is pretty straightforward, but when you're with other types of vehicles it can be easy to miss things that you're not looking for.**
- **More than half of fatal motorcycle accidents involve vehicles driven by people who just "didn't see" the motorcycle.**
 - Even when you know there are motorcycles in the vicinity, they're small enough to disappear into your blind spots or behind other cars.
 - A motorcycle's small size can also make it difficult to judge its distance and speed.
 - Stay on the safe side by assuming that it is closer and going faster than it appears to be.
- **The small compact cars that are being made now-a-days are bigger than motorcycles, but not by much.**
 - As a result, they share many of the same problems in traffic.
 - You need to keep your eyes peeled for them, too, particularly in the city.
 - Be alert and drive carefully in their vicinity.
- **At the other end of the scale are trucks, RVs and buses.**
 - They are longer, wider and heavier than cars, and have bigger blind spots, too.
 - A tractor-trailer can weigh up to 80,000 pounds, and at 50 miles an hour it needs at least 300 feet to brake to a standstill.

- **Allow extra following distance when you're behind large vehicles, because they are so hard to see around.**
 - Following closely robs you of reaction time.
 - You won't know anything's happening until the truck's brake lights go on, and that could be too late.
 - You won't be able to see road signs in time to react to what they say, either.
- **Following too closely makes it difficult for the truck driver to see you, as well.**
 - You're in one of his blind spots, a place you really don't want to be.
 - If you can't see the side mirrors on a truck's cab, then you're invisible to its driver.
 - Stay back far enough that you both can see the "big picture".
- **School buses deserve special attention.**
 - They transport large numbers of children.
 - They constantly stop and start to pick kids up and drop them off.
 - The children often dart across the road to get to and from the bus.
- **Special traffic laws apply when you're sharing the road with a school bus.**
 - If you encounter a school bus on a two-lane road and the bus is stopped with its red lights flashing, you must stop too.
 - This applies whether you're behind the bus, approaching it from the other direction, or on an intersecting road.
- **On three or four-lane roads, state laws vary.**
 - Most states require that traffic in all directions still stop for school buses, unless there is a median or guardrail dividing the highway.
 - In that case, oncoming traffic can keep moving, but traffic behind the bus must still stop.
- **Once you have stopped for a school bus, you cannot start moving again until it...**
 - Turns off its flashing lights.
 - Retracts any "swing arms".
- **Driving is more dangerous at night.**
 - Even though there are fewer cars on the road, that's when more than half of all accidents happen.

- **Slow down and use your headlights.**
 - You should switch them on when the light begins to fade at dusk, or in gloomy weather.
 - They help you see what's ahead and make it easier for other drivers to see you, too.
 - Don't "over-drive" your headlights by going too fast... you'll make it impossible to react quickly enough to what you can see.
- **Your high beams can extend your reaction time a bit, so use them as much as possible.**
 - You'll still want to maintain a moderate speed.
 - Remember that your high beams can blind drivers of the cars in front of you.
 - Switch to low beams when the "spray" of your lights reaches that of oncoming cars, or when it reaches the bumper of a car you are following.
 - Your high beams can blind you too, if you turn them on in fog or snow.
- **If you are going to drive safely in bad weather, you have to be prepared.**
 - Allow yourself extra travel time.
 - Get the weather forecast, as well as information on road conditions and any delays you may encounter.
 - Plan your trip accordingly, and think about alternate routes you can use "just in case".
 - Before you leave, clear any snow and ice off your vehicle's windows, lights and turn signals.
- **Wet and snowy weather also makes the roads slippery.**
 - Keep your speed down and increase your following distance.
 - Apply your brakes sooner when coming to a stop, and slow down before you get to turns and curves.
 - Depress the brake pedal slowly and gradually.
- **"Distracted drivers" simply aren't paying attention to what they're doing.**
- **Common distractions behind the wheel include:**
 - Talking and texting on a cell phone.
 - Eating and drinking.
 - Putting on makeup.
 - Adjusting the sound system.
 - Talking to passengers (especially children).

- **Fortunately, you can take steps ahead of time to avoid distraction.**
 - Finish dressing, make-up and grooming before leaving the house.
 - Pre-record a message on your cellphone telling callers that you're on the road and will call them back later.
 - Turn your phone off and stow it out of reach.
- **You can also avoid distraction by...**
 - Pre-programming your GPS and reviewing the navigation.
 - Pre-setting your car radio and pre-loading playlists.
 - Ensuring that kids and other passengers are seated and buckled up, and that pets are secured as well.
- **"When in doubt, pull over."**
 - On the road, you can't allow yourself to do anything that forces you to take your eyes off the road, your hands off the wheel, or your mind off your driving.
 - If you have to deal with a "kids issue", or you want to check your e-mail or make a call, pull over and stop.
 - On the highway you can do this on the shoulder or in the "breakdown lane". (remember to put on your emergency flashers) or at the next rest stop.
 - In town, just pull into a parking space.
- **When you find yourself sharing the road with a distracted driver...**
 - First, be careful.
 - Assume they don't see you.
 - Pull ahead or drop behind to give them a wide berth.
 - Above all, stay focused on your own driving.
- **"Road rage" is another problem that we're seeing more and more of.**
 - Each year there are thousands of reports of road rage.
 - Drivers are yelling at one another, making obscene gestures, even using their vehicles like weapons.
- **To prevent yourself from getting angry...**
 - Be polite and courteous... even when other drivers aren't.
 - Don't retaliate.
 - Give other drivers the benefit of the doubt.
 - Remember that driving isn't a "contest".

- **If an angry driver starts harassing you, "Rule One" is never make eye contact.**
 - Angry drivers see this as a challenge, and it just increases their rage.
 - Instead, try to get away from them as quickly and safely as possible.
 - Leave the road you're on, if necessary
- **If an angry driver starts following you:**
 - Take the threat seriously.
 - Stay on well-travelled roads.
 - Drive to the nearest police station, find a police officer, or call 911.
- **If you're involved in an accident, you need to stay calm.**
 - Turn off your engine and turn on your flashers.
 - Don't try to move your vehicle unless you're in immediate danger.
- **Check any other vehicles involved.**
 - If anyone is injured, do not move them (you may do more harm than good).
 - Instead, call for medical assistance.
- **Never leave the scene of an accident.**
 - Even if you only walk away, it's a "hit-and-run", and you can be arrested for it.
- **Always contact the police, immediately.**
 - Call 911, or if that's not possible, have a passer-by do it for you.
- **Be ready with your driver's license, registration and proof of insurance.**
 - You'll need to exchange this information with other drivers and show it to the police as well.
 - Don't forget to call your insurance company.
- **If the accident happened while you were working or in a company vehicle, report it to your supervisor immediately.**

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **Driving safely requires thinking ahead, being proactive, and doing things that can help you to avoid dangerous situations on the road.**
- **Make sure your car is well-maintained.**
- **Always wear a seat belt and never drive "under the influence".**
- **Maintain a "safety cushion" around your vehicle, with at least a three-second "following distance".**
- **Watch out for smaller vehicles and use caution when sharing the road with trucks, RVs and buses.**
- **Reduce speed and be especially careful at night and in bad weather.**
- **Don't let yourself get distracted or angry while you are driving, and know how to cope with drivers who are.**
- **If you're involved in an accident, remain calm and call the police... and never leave the scene.**
- **If you bring the proper attitude, preparation and knowledge behind the wheel with you... you can travel safely!**