

DRIVING DEFENSIVELY FOR CDL/LARGE VEHICLE DRIVERS: HANDLING ADVERSE CONDITIONS

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Driving defensively isn't just about your driving skills or your experience.**
 - It's about being aware of what is going on around you...
 - Anticipating what could happen...
 - ... and knowing what to do in any situation.
- **Driving a truck presents a unique set of challenges, just by the nature of the vehicle itself.**
 - It's longer, wider and heavier than other vehicles.
- **As a result it behaves differently than other vehicles as well.**
 - When you encounter an unusual situation or an emergency you have to react differently.
 - You need to be prepared for whatever your truck may throw at you.
- **But thinking about what can happen with your truck is only half the battle.**
 - Bad weather, work zones, distracted and aggressive drivers are all things that you can encounter as you drive as well.
- **Pedestrians can create difficult situations too.**
 - And emergencies such as a blowout or an engine fire always occur when you least expect them.
- **Knowing how to drive defensively can prepare you for all of this, prevent accidents... even save lives.**
 - So it's well worth the time and effort to take a look at what could happen on your trips... and how you can defend against it.
- **Bad weather makes special demands on your truck and on your ability as a driver.**
 - So don't wait for trouble.
 - Driving defensively in these situations begins with preparation.
- **First, make sure you've got a good snow brush/ice scraper tool on board.**

- **Check to see if your tires are in good enough shape for the season and the weather.**
 - When there's a possibility of bad weather they need to have plenty of tread on them to be safe.
 - When your tires get worn out, replace them!
- **Make sure your windshield wipers are in good shape, too, and can clear rain or snow off your windshield effectively.**
 - Check that you have plenty of non-freezing washer fluid to help your wipers do their job.
- **Throw a couple of "space blankets" into your emergency kit.**
 - They will help to keep you warm if you get stuck in the cold.
- **Snow that piles up on a car or truck during a storm make them harder to see, because they blend in with any still-falling snow and the snowy landscape.**
 - So you need to pay extra attention to what's in front of you.
- **Snow blowing off a vehicle can create instant "whiteout" conditions.**
 - If the vehicle in front of you has snow built up on its roof or trunk, increase your following distance so you're out of "impact range" if it suddenly cuts loose.
- **The basis of the control that you have over your truck is the friction between its tires and the road's surface.**
- **Bad weather brings rain, snow and ice, all of which can break that "grip". So to stay out of trouble you should...**
 - Apply your brakes sooner when coming to a stop.
 - Slow down before you get to turns and curves.
 - Depress the brake pedal slowly and gradually.
- **But if the worst happens you need to understand how to get control of your truck back.**
 - "Skidding" occurs when one or more of a vehicle's wheels lose friction with the road.
- **If you start to skid, don't slam on the brakes!**
 - This robs you of whatever friction and control you may have left.
 - Instead, slow down by easing your foot off the gas pedal.

- **Then gain control by steering with the direction of the skid.**
 - If your back end is skidding to the right, steer to the right.
 - If it skids to the left, steer to the left.
- **Another "zero-friction" road problem that can occur is "hydroplaning".**
 - This happens when there's so much water on the pavement that the grooves in your tires can't handle it, and the rubber loses contact with the road.
- **If you begin to hydroplane, do not use the brakes.**
 - Instead, ease your foot off the gas.
 - As you slow down, your wheels will then "reconnect" with the road, and you'll regain control.
- **Murphy's Law says that even people who drive defensively can sometimes get a flat tire, so you need to know how to react if one finds you.**
- **Not all flat tires go "bang".**
 - But the ones that do are called "blowouts", and they're dangerous.
- **With a blowout the tire goes flat quickly, creating a lot more friction with the road.**
 - This will pull your truck sharply to the side.
 - To maintain control you need to take action.
- **Do not use the brakes.**
 - That will only make your truck pull to the side more violently.
 - You actually need to accelerate instead.
 - Keep a firm grip on your steering wheel and compensate for the pull of the flat by turning the wheel the other way.
- **When you've regained control, slow down and turn on your emergency flashers.**
 - Signal and move slowly to the shoulder or breakdown lane.
 - Then get to a safe, flat surface, well away from traffic, if possible.
 - Put out your flares or reflectors.
 - Then call your office, dispatcher or tire service for assistance.

- **Driving defensively is especially important when you're sharing the road with vehicles like school buses, delivery vans or other trucks.**
 - All of them are likely to stop unexpectedly, and when they do there's often pedestrian activity as well.
 - To avoid trouble, add at least a couple seconds of extra following distance when you're behind them.
- **"Big rigs" and tour buses present their own set of challenges.**
 - One problem with these vehicles is obvious... their size.
- **A tractor-trailer can weigh up to 80,000 pounds, and at 50 miles per hour it requires at least 300 feet to brake to a standstill.**
- **Tractor-trailers and buses have bigger blind spots, as well.**
 - You want to stay out of these.
 - If you can't see the side mirrors on a truck's cab, then you're invisible to its driver.
- **If you've ever been passed by another truck on the highway you've probably felt what's called "buffeting".**
 - This happens when the air the truck is pushing out of its way hits your own truck hard enough to push you off course.
- **When you're passing or being passed by another truck, bus or RV, keep both your hands on the steering wheel.**
 - As the air pressure pushes your truck away from the other vehicle, steer gently into the push.
- **Be careful not to overcorrect.**
 - That will put you way closer to them than you want to be.
- **When you want to pass one of these big vehicles, it's basically the same as passing a car, but there are some differences.**
- **You need more open road to pass another truck or a bus, since it takes longer to get around them.**
 - So pass quickly and minimize your time in their blind spots.
 - Give them plenty of "side clearance".
 - Be ready for buffeting when you get near their front.
 - Always wait until you can see both of their headlights in your rear-view mirror before merging back into their lane.

- **Eating a sandwich or drinking coffee while you're driving or talking on your cell phone when you're behind the wheel can certainly seem harmless enough.. but it's not!**
- **Any activity that takes your eyes off the road, your hands off the wheel, or your mind off your driving is a "distraction".**
 - And distraction means "trouble".
- **Distracted driving has been linked to as many as one in four crashes and injures hundreds of thousands of people annually.**
- **Distraction comes in many forms:**
 - Adjusting your sound system.
 - Putting on make-up or combing your hair.
 - Eating lunch.
 - Using your cell phone.
- **If you find that you are sharing the road with a distracted driver...**
 - Be careful.
 - Assume they don't see you.
 - Pull ahead or drop behind to give them a wide berth.
- **Another bad habit that you can avoid yourself but can't always escape in other drivers, is "aggressive driving".**
- **Aggressive drivers...**
 - Push the speed limit.
 - Cut off other vehicles.
 - Fail to signal their turn.
 - Merge recklessly.
 - Take a lot of other risks with their lives and yours.
 - So you need to be prepared to "defend" yourself.
- **The most common type of aggressive drivers out there are the "tailgaters".**
 - They're always "pushing"!
 - Because they want to go faster, tailgaters follow right behind your truck, ignoring the possibility of rear-ending you if you stop quickly.

- **When driving defensively, the best way to eliminate the threat from tailgaters is to let them pass you.**
 - If it's possible, change lanes to get out of their way.
 - Otherwise, slow down and keep to the right.
- **If they can't or won't pass...**
 - Turn your emergency flashers on.
 - Slow down.
 - Pull over to the side of the road so they can go around you.
- **Some aggressive drivers are especially dangerous because they're angry.**
 - They're the ones with "road rage".
- **Each year there are thousands of reports of "road rage".**
 - Drivers yelling at one another.
 - Making obscene gestures.
 - Using their vehicles as "weapons".
- **What should you do if you find yourself on the receiving end of another driver's road rage?**
 - Rule number one is never make eye contact with an angry driver.
 - They see it as a challenge, and it only increases their rage.
 - Remain calm.
 - Ignore gestures and shouts.
 - Do not return them.
- **Try to get away from the angry driver as quickly and safely as possible.**
 - Slow down and let them pass.
 - If they won't, you may need to leave the road that you're on.
- **If they keep following you...**
 - Take the threat seriously.
 - Do not stop or leave your truck
 - Stay on well-travelled roads.
 - Look for a police officer, drive to the nearest police station or call 911.
- **There are several types of situations where truck drivers need to pay special attention.**
 - As if other vehicles weren't enough, in many of these you may have to deal with pedestrians as well.

- **Most pedestrian accidents occur when someone walks into the path of an approaching vehicle.**
 - So when you are in an area that has pedestrian traffic you really need to think "defensive driving".
- **You should assume that a pedestrian will not give you the right-of-way, so you need to wait until it is obvious that they are waiting for you to start moving.**
- **Even when all of the surrounding pedestrians are in sight, they will often do the unexpected.**
 - So you need to adjust your speed so that you have time to react if they make a move.
- **Remember too that pedestrians can frequently stand or walk into your "blind spots".**
 - So you need to constantly do a scan around your truck as you travel.
- **Another thing that pedestrians often do is misjudge the speed and proximity of a truck and assume that the driver can and will slow down for them.**
 - They also think that just because they can see your truck that you can see them as well... which is often not the case.
- **Driving through a "work zone" is another situation that can present a lot of hazards for trucks, including:**
 - Lane changes.
 - Uneven road surfaces.
 - Moving workers and equipment.
 - Vehicles suddenly stopping and starting.
 - Confused drivers.
- **In fact, almost three times as many fatal work zone crashes involve large trucks vs. highway crashes.**
 - So, it's important to really be focused and drive defensively when you encounter a work zone.

- **First, slow down, increase your "following distance" and be prepared to stop at any time.**
 - Look for work zone signs and signals, including speed limit changes... and obey them.
 - Stay alert for any vehicles that could enter the road, especially in your blind spots.
 - Scan ahead for changing traffic patterns.
 - Keep an eye out for flaggers and other road crew as well.
- **No matter how good a driver you are, emergencies are going to occur.**
 - As in many other situations, in these cases driving defensively means trying to anticipate what might happen and making sure you are prepared for it.
- **When you're doing your vehicle inspection make sure that all of your emergency equipment is on board, including...**
 - Road flares.
 - Reflectors.
 - A fire extinguisher.
- **Make sure that your truck's flashers are working as well.**
- **You will want to confirm that your cell phone is fully charged before you leave on your trip too.**
- **As you drive, keep your eyes out for "escape routes" and "pull-offs" where you can safely stop if need be.**
 - If your truck breaks down, you have a flat tire, your load shifts or any other type of emergency occurs slow down and get out of the travel lanes as soon as possible.
- **If you feel that you are in danger as a result of something like an engine fire or fuel leak, once you come to a stop, turn on your flashers and get out of the truck.**
 - Put out your flares or reflectors.
 - Then, depending on the nature of the emergency, contact your dispatcher, your authorized tire service or the state or local police.
- **If you're dealing with an engine fire only try to put it out if you have been trained in how to use the truck's extinguisher and fighting the fire won't put you in danger.**

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **Prepare your vehicle and yourself for safe driving in bad weather. Use your brakes carefully. Steer with the direction of skids.**
- **Don't be a distracted or aggressive driver yourself and stay away from them on the road.**
- **Know how your truck will behave if you have a blowout and what you should do to handle it.**
- **Remember that other drivers can misjudge how much space it takes for a truck to make a turn or clear an intersection and adjust accordingly.**
- **Allow other trucks and buses plenty of space when passing and watch out for buffeting.**
- **Be aware of pedestrian traffic as you drive. Be prepared for them to do the unexpected.**
- **The road is a dangerous place, but you can lower the risks by driving defensively.**
- **Whether you're dealing with bad weather, bad drivers or just plain bad luck, you can defend yourself... and arrive at the end of your journey safely!**