

Module 1 - Introduction – The Traffic Safety Problem

Vehicular crashes in the United States that kill and injure people are approaching epidemic rates. The Center for Disease Control in Atlanta lists accidental death as the fifth leading cause of death in the United States. Fatalities related to motor vehicles and other road users are the number one cause of accidental death. Statistics indicate that motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death for people ages 3 to 33. Driving puts you at risk of unintentional injury, the risk is always present. However, there are several things you can do to lower that risk.

The purpose of this course is to provide you with safe and defensive driving tips and information that will help you reduce your risk of a crash; a crash which could result in financial loss, personal injury, or death to yourself or others. We begin this course with a snapshot of what causes crashes on our roads, the responsibilities we all have as drivers, and how to reduce your risk of being involved in a crash.

Driving a motor vehicle involves skilled and properly timed actions under varying road and traffic conditions based on decisions that depend on learned information, realistic perceptions, sound judgments, and appropriate caution.

You probably already know how to drive safely. Using those skills and knowledge, and applying the rules of the road are the first steps to surviving a drive.

There is no doubt that you need to stay focused on the task of driving with a realistic perception of your risk and an understanding of why you need to be focused on the task of driving. Things happen quickly and you need to be prepared for them.

In this slide, for example, the white car pulled out of a driveway with little room for the silver car to react. You need to be aware of your driving environment... The actions of the white car required the silver car to quickly change lanes to avoid a collision; requiring you, in the subsequent car in the left hand lane, to adjust in order to avoid the silver car. Defensive driving requires you to anticipate and adjust accordingly to changes other road users make in their speed and direction.

You also need to recognize clues indicating the potential for collision. Prioritize your options and exercise sound judgment! There are several proven techniques that will help you detect and avoid hazardous situations while driving. These techniques will be presented in depth in this module.

Take a good look at this driving scene. There are at least eight things in this picture that are clues to possible risk ahead. These messages tell you to take appropriate caution as you enter the intersection. Select the items that are warning you of potential risk by clicking on them with your mouse.

A railroad crossing sign ahead indicates a “possible” risk of a train. The railroad lights are starting to flash, but the gate is still up – a train will soon enter the busy intersection. The crossing guard represents a possible risk that young, unpredictable child pedestrians are near by. The Pedestrian crossing sign indicates that children or adult pedestrians may be present in the intersection ahead. The brake lights on the two vehicles ahead are an indication that traffic is slowing and will soon stop.

The guardrail is here for a reason – what is the risk? Is it to protect traffic from hitting the children on the sidewalk? The red hand on the signal is telling pedestrians not to cross the street but may also be indicating that your green signal will soon change.

The next module presents information on the traffic safety challenges we all face as a society. This concludes the introduction module.