

Module 4 – Risk Awareness

Risk when driving is defined as the chance of injury, damage, or some form of loss. In the driving environment, risk is always present.

It is reported that more than half of us believe that our odds of being in a vehicular crash are very low - less than 1 in 100. Unfortunately this perception does not match reality. *So, what are our odds????*

If you believe that just because you are a good driver you will not have a collision, think again. To help lower your risk, sharpen your driving skills.

As a driver, you can lower your exposure to risk by searching the entire sight view of traffic for potential dangers and hazards; always signaling your intentions; focusing only on your driving; and adjusting your speed and the space around your vehicle based on visibility, road, and traffic conditions.

This module will address the probability, consequences, and manageability of risk when you drive. At the conclusion of this module you will recognize how to evaluate and manage your risk of being in a crash.

More than 235,000 traffic crashes occurred in Florida in 2010. That equals approximately 645 crashes per day. 2,444 people died in those crashes. To put this in perspective, Orlando has a little over 235,000 people – imagine every resident of Orlando having a crash each year.

Nearly 200,000 people were injured in Florida crashes. Imagine three quarters of the population of Tampa injured due to crashes.

Everyday driving issues related to your driving patterns can increase your crash risk. For example, traveling many miles per day in congested and low visibility traffic conditions can increase your crash risk.

Driving to and from work during rush hour when drivers are stuck in heavy traffic; frustration builds and tempers flare. Those conditions often lead to aggressive driving.

Speed limits are set as a prudent speed to travel on a particular roadway *in ideal conditions*. Traveling faster than the limit increases the risk and severity of a crash. When you are in a hurry, speeding doesn't get you there much faster, but it does increase your risk of being in a crash. Leave earlier and get there safely.

Drinking and driving is a deadly combination. Even one drink affects your ability to safely operate a vehicle. Don't do it.

Drivers who are not paying attention to the driving environment can easily run off the road and/or cause collisions. Distractions include electronic communication devices, eating, pets, children, and reading.

In Florida, on Fridays, during the 5:00 p.m. hour, the highest numbers of all types of crashes occur. In 2010, 2,960 crashes happened during the Friday 5:00 p.m. hour. On Sunday, during the 8:00 p.m. hour, the highest number of fatal crashes occurred. There were 29 in 2010.

Nationally, over six million crashes occur every year due to driving too fast in bad weather, low traction, and poor visibility conditions.

Risk continuously exists in the driving environment. Recognize how your driving environment changes each time you get behind the wheel - weather, road conditions, your vehicle, and other road users are unpredictable.

Develop the habit of evaluating each of those risk factors, including your own well being, every time you drive. Lack of risk awareness is a major factor in traffic crashes.

The following are some guidelines that can help you assess risk more accurately:

- Consider the probability of a dangerous event developing;
- Consider the consequences of every decision; and
- Prepare to take action to manage the driving situation.

Remember the four elements of the highway system: the roadway, vehicle, driver, and other road users. Each element has associated risks. Evaluate these elements for their risk potential before and during your drive.

Evaluate your risk as the driver. Consider things such as fatigue, impairment, allergies, and illness.

Assess the conditions of the roadway and your route. Consider the weather, light conditions, traction conditions, construction zones, and possible congestion. Check the traffic and weather forecast before you leave.

Assess the risk in each category. Evaluate your mental list. If your list has multiple factors in multiple categories, your crash probability is at an elevated level. Reconsider getting behind the wheel.

While driving, if you encounter an unanticipated scenario than you anticipated, consider the consequences and make a safe decision on how to proceed. Be aware of the roadway and the off-road environment. Scan your environment well ahead, to the sides, and behind. Keep your eyes moving and search the entire traffic scene. Predict the chances of a conflict occurring. Anticipate the actions of others. What is the probability that a dangerous event will occur? Be prepared to manage hazardous situations.

Driving is a complex task that demands your undivided attention. Risk is lowest when you handle one task at a time.

Resist distractions like talking on a cell phone, text messaging, lighting a cigarette, loading a CD, or having a conversation with your passengers.

Because the actions of other road users are unpredictable, adequately communicate to those around you. Always signal your intention to change lanes or turn. Use your signals, lights, or horn before you execute a pass or an evasive action.

Adjust your vehicle's position or speed to help prevent a dangerous event from occurring or to minimize the consequences of an unavoidable crash. Practice "what if" scenarios in your head but don't let it become a distraction.

The most important decisions you make to lower or alter your risk of collision are associated with managing the situation.

Actions of all roadway users including motorcyclists, pedestrians, bicyclists, animals, and other drivers impact your level of risk as a driver. To help manage risk, it is essential that you remain alert to conditions or objects that can increase levels of risk.

Here is a checklist to help you manage risk:

- Conduct a thorough visual search. Try to search 30 seconds ahead of your path of travel for objects or conditions that could become a threat.
- Have a plan. Identify an alternate path of travel 15 seconds ahead, and the level of traction available in case of an emergency.
- Never tailgate. Always travel with an adequate cushion of space ahead of your vehicle.
- Position your vehicle with space to the sides and the front with an escape route, should you need it.
- Obey all traffic controls.
- Obey all right of way rules.
- Drive defensively. Try to predict the possible actions of other highway users.

Checklist continued:

- Do not drive where you cannot see. If your vision is blocked, reduce your speed and reposition your vehicle so you can see well ahead, and around your vehicle. Do not forget to look behind.
- See and be seen. Communicate your presence to other road users by always driving with your daytime running lights or low-beam headlights. Remember, if you cannot see them, they probably cannot see you.
- Look where you want your vehicle to go.
- Avoid distractions.
- Avoid sudden steering and braking movements.
- Be a considerate driver.
- Keep your vehicle in good mechanical condition.

Let's see if we can remember some important points. You will now be asked some review questions based on this CBT. You may select your answer by choosing the corresponding button or by pressing the corresponding letter on your keyboard.

1. Approximately, how many crashes per day happen in Florida?
 - a. 545
 - b. 550
 - c. 650
 - d. 645

The answer is d. 645.

2. Which of the following continuously exists in the driving environment?
 - a. Poor Weather Conditions
 - b. Construction
 - c. Risk
 - d. Drivers with Road Rage

The answer is c. Risk.

3. How many seconds ahead of your path of travel should you try to search for objects or conditions that could be a threat?
 - a. 10
 - b. 20
 - c. 30
 - d. 40

The answer is c. 30.

And now let's review the lesson.

In the driving environment, the chance of injury, damage, or loss is always present. Recognize how your driving environment changes each time you get behind the wheel - weather, road conditions, your vehicle and other drivers are unpredictable. Develop the habit of evaluating all risk factors, including your own well being, every time you drive.

Since it is nearly impossible to determine the level of risk in specific driving situations accurately, the following are some guidelines that can help you assess risk more accurately:

- Consider the probability of a dangerous event developing.
- Consider the consequences of your decision.
- Prepare to take action to manage the driving situation.

This module has given you some good defensive driving methods to evaluate and manage potential risks. The next module is about what we see and how that information is critical to the driving task. It is so important; an entire module is dedicated to visual search.

The next module presents information on how to identify techniques and reasons why it is important to conduct a thorough visual search. This concludes the module on Risk Awareness.