

Defensive Driving – Abbreviated Version

Welcome to the Abbreviated Version of the Defensive Driving CBT. To begin this course, select the Start button or press Shift+N on your keyboard.

Introduction

The Center for Disease Control in Atlanta lists accidental death as the fourth leading cause of death in the United States. Fatalities related to motor vehicles and other road users are the second highest cause of accidental death. Statistics indicate that motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death for people ages 3 to 33.

In Florida, annually there are approximately 645 crashes per day – about one crash every minute, every day, all year long.

The top five contributing factors to crashes in Florida are:

1. Inattention;
2. Failure to yield right of way;
3. Failure to keep in proper lane;
4. Driving under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or medication; and
5. Failure to obey traffic signs and signals.

The purpose of this course is to provide you with safe and defensive driving tips and information to 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'll review five categories of risk: Other drivers, the environment, roadways, unique vehicles, and speed.

Risk: Drivers

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.

If you maintain a safe margin of space around your vehicle you will minimize your chances of having to make sudden steering or braking maneuvers.

Rear-end crashes are the most common type of collisions because drivers follow too close to the vehicle in front of them. When there is not enough space or time to make a sudden stop or maneuver to the sides to avoid a collision, a crash becomes inevitable. According to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles Traffic Crash Statistics Report, in 2009 30% of injury crashes were rear end collisions.

Maintain a safe margin of space in the front, sides, and to the rear of your vehicle. This will give you not only a cushion but room for an escape route if you need one. The amount of space you need increases with higher speeds. The faster you travel the more space you need to react to situations on the roadway. Begin managing space by creating a safe cushion of empty space around your vehicle to use in case you need to maneuver out of a dangerous situation.

Impaired Driving

Impaired driving continues to be one of North America's greatest and most persistent threats to public safety. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, impaired driving is the act of operating or driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or drugs to the degree that mental and motor skills are impaired.

Alcohol is the deadliest drug when it comes to motor vehicle safety. Alcohol is a depressant that affects judgment, vision, reaction time, and coordination, critical to safe driving. Even if you do not drink, it is still important for you to understand how alcohol affects driving behavior.

Now let's consider drug impaired crashes. Drugs are designed to alter specific body functions and consequently can alter your ability to perceive, make sound judgments, and react quickly.

Drug side effects vary and may include:

- Drowsiness;
- Blurred vision;
- Sensitivity to bright light;
- Muscle ache;
- Nausea; and
- Slowed reaction time.

All of these side effects alter a driver's performance!

The majority of drug users are under the influence of legal drugs such as medicine for colds, a headache, or muscle or joint pain. It is estimated that less than 5% of the population uses illegal drugs.

Drugs can affect you in the following ways:

- Delayed reaction time;
- Reduction in your mental or physical abilities; and
- Intense or unexpected reactions.

Aggressive Driving

While we may think of aggressive driving as "the operation of a motor vehicle in a manner that endangers or is likely to endanger persons or property" – Florida law defines aggressive, careless driving as two or more of these acts committed simultaneously or in succession:

- Exceeding the posted speed;
- Unsafely or improperly changing lanes;
- Following another vehicle too closely;
- Failing to yield the right-of-way;
- Improperly passing; and

Violating traffic control or signal devices

Risk: Environment

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.

If signals and bells are flashing and ringing, do not enter the intersection. Never try to beat the train. Never position your vehicle so that it is straddling the railroad crossing or between the gates if you are forced to stop while you are stuck in a traffic jam. Search ahead for brake lights and slowing traffic near a railroad crossing. Never STOP on or near the tracks.

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: Roadways

As experienced drivers, we should be aware that roadways are classified by their function. Expressways and divided highways are classified as high speed roads and consequently pose a greater risk of potential high-impact crashes.

Two-lane rural roadways may have slower speeds but vehicles are traveling close together in the opposite direction and provide an increased risk of a head-on collision.

Sometimes the roads are slick or wet, and present a low-traction surface making it hard to control the speed and direction your vehicle is traveling. The surface area of each tire that touches the roadway is the only area that provides the traction necessary to maneuver the vehicle. In fact, for each tire, the traction being provided is very small – only about the size of a palm print.

When you encounter wet roads, loose gravel, or slippery surfaces, think about how much more dangerous those low-traction situations can be – it only takes a thin film of water to cause hydroplaning. That small surface area of each tire responsible for gripping the surface can quickly be compromised.

Risk: Unique Vehicles

As we drive, we are surrounded on the road by many types of vehicles that have unique handling and operating characteristics.

Here in Florida we have a large number of motorcycles whose riders can be on the road 365 days a year. They are small, fast, and sometimes difficult to see.

Similarly, bicyclists are frequently part of the roadway mix. Remember that effective in 2010 the state of Florida mandated that a vehicle “must pass the bicycle or other nonmotorized vehicle at a safe distance of not less than 3 feet between the vehicle and the bicycle or other nonmotorized vehicle”.

Delivery trucks, vans, and semi-trucks can block your line-of-sight.

There are other vehicles such as street sweepers, school buses, and service vehicles that can present visibility, spatial, and speed issues while driving. Be alert and prepared to react as needed to avoid a crash.

Risk: Speed

Speed influences crashes in four basic ways:

1. It increases the distance a vehicle travels from when a driver detects an emergency until the driver reacts.
2. It increases the distance needed to stop a vehicle once an emergency is perceived.
3. Crash severity increases by the square of the speed. For example, when speed increases from 40 to 60 mph, speed goes up 50 percent while the energy released in a crash more than doubles.
4. Higher crash speeds reduce the ability of vehicles, restraint systems, and roadway hardware such as guardrails, barriers, and impact attenuators to protect occupants.

Driving at high speeds is dangerous, even when you are traveling the speed limit. High speed increases the risk of collision because:

- Vision is reduced;
- Traction and maneuverability are reduced;
- Inertia is increased and it takes the brakes longer to stop the vehicle;
- Force of impact is greater; and
- May cause other road users to misjudge the time they may have to react.

As a driver, it's important to understand that increased speed increases your stopping distance. Stopping distances involve three factors: Perception distance, Reaction distance, and Braking distance.

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.

Florida State Laws

You need to understand laws and rules of the road and combine that knowledge with good judgment. Basic traffic laws are in place for all operators to follow. We will bring to your specific attention a few Florida laws that some drivers may be unaware of or may need reminding.

Stop Bar

Slowing down or "rolling through" a STOP bar is unsafe and against the law. Stop at the crossbar before your vehicle enters a crosswalk, they can be marked or unmarked. If there is no marked crosswalk present, stop your vehicle just before your front tires reach the bold stop bar marking on the pavement. If there is no stop bar, stop at the point nearest the intersecting roadway where you have a view of approaching traffic before entering the intersection.

Directional Signal

The law requires you to use your directional signal when turning or changing lanes. This applies to bicyclists also, who must use an appropriate hand signal.

Right of Way

At an uncontrolled intersection, stop and yield the right of way to any vehicle which has entered the intersection from another roadway. Also yield the right of way when backing out of a driveway or when you exit a parking space in a parking lot.

Malfunctioning Traffic Signal

If a traffic signal is not functioning, all vehicles are to treat it as a four-way stop and the driver of the first vehicle to stop shall be the first to proceed. If two or more vehicles reach the intersection at the same time, the driver of the vehicle on the left shall yield the right of way to the vehicle on the right.

Move Over Law

Violation of Florida's "move over" law will result in three points on your license if you fail to move over for an emergency vehicle. The law requires that you must move over to the other lane when traveling on a roadway which has at least two or more lanes in the same direction or slow to 20 mph below the posted speed if a lane change is not possible or not safe but only when the speed limit is greater than 25 mph. When the speed limit is less than 20 mph, the law states that all motorists must travel at 5 mph. This law applies when any law enforcement, emergency vehicles, and service vehicles is parked on the right of way and making use of any visual signals or emergency flashers.

Unmarked Speed Zone

The maximum speed limit in a residential area, or unmarked speed zone can vary from municipality to municipality, but generally the speed limit is 25 miles per hour.

The 55 MPH maximum speed limit is still in effect in Florida except where otherwise posted. Speed limits are 70 MPH on **some** rural interstate highways. Speed limits may be different on other multi-lane highways. Drivers should not assume because the area appears to be rural, the limit is 70 MPH. Observe and obey the posted speed signs as there may be changes from area to area along the selected roads and highways.

Construction Zone

Fines are doubled for speeding in a construction zone (when workers are present) or a school zone. Get caught speeding more than 30 mph over the speed limit in a school or construction zone and the fine can be over \$500.

Fine for Motorcyclists

There is also a \$1000 fine for motorcyclists riding with one wheel off the ground.

Safety Belt Law

The Florida safety belt law applies at all times. Safety belt laws apply to all cars, pickup trucks, and vans operated on Florida roads. All passengers in the front seat must wear a safety belt. All passengers under 18 must wear a safety belt. Children 3 and younger must be secured in a federally approved child-restraint seat.

Children 4 through 5 must be secured by either a federally approved child restraint seat or safety belt. The driver is responsible for buckling up the child. The cost for a safety belt violation is \$30 plus costs which can total in excess of \$100. For a driver with a child passenger not properly restrained, the violation is \$60.

School Buses

School Buses are on our roadways every day. To ensure our students are safe on the roads, we encourage you to be aware as you drive. Remember: Stop on red, kids ahead!

When transportation is required, School Buses are the safest way for students to get to and from school in the United States. School Buses across America serve more than 25 million students, and with your help, we can ensure that every single student stays safe.

"Hi! I'm Sylvia, a licensed and trained School Bus operator. Annually, there are an average of 15 fatalities at School Bus stops. Let's take a look at what you should do when approaching a stopped School Bus."

When you're driving, it's important to pay attention to your surroundings. It's always a good idea to stay a safe distance behind any vehicle, especially our School Buses. Flashing yellow lights indicate that a School Bus is preparing to stop. When a bus comes to a stop, the red lights begin flashing and the stop arms are extended. Florida law requires that vehicles behind the bus must come to a complete stop, regardless of which lane you're in. Sometimes there's confusion about the law when you approach a stopped school bus going the opposite direction in an oncoming lane.

The easiest to recognize is a two-lane road. On a two-lane road, all vehicles must come to a stop when the School Bus is stopped. Vehicles travelling in both direction on a multi-lane road or a highway must stop, even if the lanes are separated by a turn lane. The only time traffic approaching an oncoming School Bus does not need to stop, is if there is a raised barrier such as a concrete divider, or at least 5 feet of unpaved space separating the lanes of traffic. When there is a median, motorists still need to exercise caution as the children may not be aware of the traffic around them.

"Hi, I'm Captain Welch with the Florida Highway Patrol. Each year, Florida drivers illegally pass School Buses nearly two-million times. Each illegal pass-by could result in tragic injury or fatality of a student."

The inconvenience of an extra few seconds spent waiting for a stopped School Bus is insignificant when compared to the loss of a child's life.

While this law may be confusing to some, simply put, Florida law requires that motorists stop when approaching any School Bus that displays its flashing red lights and stop arms extended. Passing a stopped School Bus in Florida not only endangers our most precious resource, our children, but it can also empty your wallet. Penalties could include up to a \$500 fine, 4 points on your driver's license, and could lead to a suspension of your driving privilege.

School Buses are extremely safe. Safety features include steel reinforced frames, flashing lights, and stop sign arms. Most School Bus injuries take place outside the bus, when children are getting on and off them. As a School Bus driver, I am highly trained and always have student safety in mind.

School Buses are safest, when drivers obey all of our laws. Drive carefully. Your safety is important to us.

Do your part to help keep us out of harm's way. Remember: Stop on red, Kids ahead!

Pedestrians

Florida leads the country in pedestrian deaths in 2009 with 466. Pedestrians often enter an intersection before it is safe, or they dash across the street when they are in a hurry. Even though they might know better, it is your responsibility as a vehicle operator to yield the right of way to them.

Be aware that drivers in Florida are now required to stop for pedestrians: "The driver of a vehicle at any crosswalk where a sign so indicates shall stop and remain stopped to allow a pedestrian to cross a roadway when the pedestrian is in the crosswalk or steps into the crosswalk and is upon the half of the roadway upon which the vehicle is traveling or when the pedestrian is approaching so closely from the opposite half of the roadway as to be in danger."

Your license may be suspended or revoked for a variety of reasons including:

- Driving under the influence of alcohol or another substance;
- Driving recklessly;
- Leaving the scene of a collision;
- Failing to satisfy a citation or appear in court;
- Refusing to take a chemical test; and
- Displaying a canceled, altered, or fictitious license.

This concludes the Abbreviated Version of the Defensive Driving CBT . A certificate is available for your records only. Thank you for your time and attention.