

Best Practice Guide

Defensive Driving



Defend Yourself On The Road

Defensive driving is a style of driving which can help you to keep away from problems on the road. A defensive driver does not just concentrate on his or her own actions, but also concentrates on the actions of other road users.

Additionally, a defensive driver goes beyond the laws of the road, continuously assessing the potential hazards and adapting his or her driving behaviour to suit the conditions.

The main purpose of defensive driving is to reduce the chance of collisions or incidents despite the actions of other road users and the conditions on the road.

Look For Hazards

If possible you should be looking for potential hazards and traffic conditions as far as your vehicle would reach in 12 seconds. Within this distance you should be 'scanning' what is happening both on and to the side of the road and should vary your speed and position as necessary.

Use Your Mirrors

One of the most valuable safety features your vehicle has is the mirrors, especially in relation to defensive driving.

Check mirrors:

- About every 10 seconds to see what is happening behind and around you.
- When changing lanes or intending to change speed or direction.
- Before moving off.

Don't Forget The Blind Spots

Mirrors are very useful for helping you see what is happening around your vehicle, but they leave 'blind spots' in your field of vision.

Consider your blind spots when:

- Intending to change lanes.
- Planning to turn.
- Setting off from stationary.
- Reversing - if in doubt get out and check!

Keep Calm

A defensive driver is always tolerant of the mistakes of other road users and is aware that everyone is entitled to use the road as much as they are.

If another driver makes a mistake, do not allow yourself to be bothered by it and remain calm.

Leave A Safety Space

Always keep your distance from the vehicle in front (at least 2 seconds) and make sure you keep well back in situations where you are more likely to encounter unexpected hazards, such as when you are approaching a hill or bend or cannot see far ahead.

Don't Make Assumptions

Defensive drivers are always prepared for the actions of other road users.

Never assume:

- Other drivers will give way, even if they should.
- The driver in front has seen an upcoming hazard - keep well back in case they brake suddenly.
- Another driver will slow down, even if they should.
- Other drivers have seen you.

Look For Clues

As well as constantly assessing your surroundings, to drive defensively you should look for 'clues' which can help you to anticipate the actions of others, such as:

- Location - if you are driving through a town expect to see pedestrians stepping into the road.
- The time of day - if it is close to school starting / finishing time, expect to see children close to the road.
- Road signs - these warn you about upcoming bends, hidden turnings etc.

Be Seen

An important aspect of defensive driving is ensuring your vehicle is visible to other road users.

Make sure you:

- Signal all turns and lane changes in plenty of time.
- Regularly check all brake and exterior lights to make sure they are working.
- Position your vehicle so that other road users can see you - make sure you're not hidden in a vehicle's blind spots;
- Use your headlights at any time that visibility is reduced.

Watch The Weather

A defensive driver knows that speed limits inform road users of the maximum speed limit (and also minimum on some roads) in ideal conditions. The weather can have a massive effect on road conditions, visibility, stopping distances and vehicle performance.

You should slow down and leave bigger following distances when it is:

- Very sunny.
- Snowing / Icy.
- Foggy.
- Raining.
- Dark.



Don't Be Distracted

Defensive drivers know that ANY distraction is dangerous.

This includes:

- Changing the radio / CD.
- Talking to a passenger.
- Speaking on a mobile phone - whether hand-held or hands-free.
- Driving while upset, tired or stressed.

Impairment Affects Ability

To drive defensively you cannot be impaired. Illegal drugs, alcohol and some over-the-counter medicines can dramatically affect a person's driving ability and can cause side effects such as impaired reaction times, blurred vision, drowsiness and dizziness.

Warning

Defensive driving includes paying attention to the actions of vulnerable road users such as children, pedestrians and cyclists who can often be even more unpredictable than drivers.

- D**on't make any assumptions.
- E**nsure you look well ahead when driving.
- F**ollow other vehicles at a safe distance.
- E**xpect the unexpected.
- N**ever forget about blind spots.
- S**earch for clues up ahead.
- I**mpaired driving is dangerous.
- V**isibility to others is crucial.
- E**nsure you avoid distractions.

