



VITALS

For Medical Transport Professionals

A Weekly Safety Newsletter

The Importance Of Space

In driving, speed and space can increase your control of any given driving situation. You need control, in order to keep your car (and you) moving and to be able to stop or change direction when necessary. You must be able to control very movement and every attempt to slow or stop, in the distance and time necessary, without losing control, and running off the road or into another object. Remember, you cannot control the outcome if you lost control of your vehicle.

Your best control is derived from speed and space. Ever notice how traffic "bunches up?" There may be miles of open road and yet vehicles tend to change lanes, tailgate, refuse to adjust speed and many other dangerous acts, only to remain too close to other vehicles. To remain in control, at all times, is critical. Reduced space between your vehicle and other vehicles or objects, and you reduce control. Increased speed reduces control and time. If you approach (or are approached by) a "group" of vehicles, your best solution is usually to stay in the right lane and slow down just enough from the faster vehicles to pass on the left. Then it would be safe for you to pass any slower moving vehicles.

Don't tailgate -**Ever** - as this is a very dangerous loss of control. If you tailgate, you have given up almost all of your control of the situation. If another vehicle is tailgating you, move over as soon as possible. Keep space, speed and time on your side and you will be able to avoid the circumstances and factors that cause accident involvement.

"I'm a Good Driver..."

Why do you think some people are able to drive for years without an accident, driving in the same conditions as those who do have accidents? Are they "better" drivers? How does "being a good driver" fit into the equation when so much of the driving task (and subsequent accidents) is math and physics? **Perception time.** Plus, being very alert and using all those things you learned in defensive driving classes, like the following distance rule (one second for each 10 feet of vehicle length), scanning, etc. Perception time is the time it takes for you to perceive and identify a problem, decide what to do, and then react. Here's an example:

At 60 MPH (one mile per minute), your vehicle is traveling 88 feet per second. If you determine that you need to stop immediately ("perception"), it will take 1/2 second (44 feet) to 3/4 second (66 feet) to get your foot off the accelerator onto the break, and another 1/4 second (22 feet) for the break lining to get to the brake drum.



In this example, you've already covered a lot of ground and the vehicle hasn't even started to brake yet. Actual braking distance varies greatly, depending upon the road surface, vehicle weight, tires, temperature, speed, and other factors. In a truck, it can be 300 feet. On a slick road, it can be many times that distance. At night, your headlights may only shine out about 300 feet, so you may not be able to see something stopped in the road in the time it takes to actually stop.

Slowing down reduces **ALL** of these factors. Slower speeds mean more time to perceive a problem, less braking distance and fewer feet covered. If you do hit something, the energy absorbed is far less, resulting in much less damage and injury, and you have much more control. Forces increase geometrically with speed. For example, forces at 40 MPH may be twice that at 20 MPH, but only a 10 MPH increase may double the distance again. By 60 MPH, these forces start doubling at only 5 MPH faster. Slow down just a little and you reduce damage and injury potential dramatically. Slow down at night, and you increase the time necessary to see a hazard.

Some people *know* how to drive right, so why do they ignore the things they've learned? They may say either, "I don't think it would happen to me," or "I didn't know how *violent* even a small accident could be." If you know how, do it. If you don't know, learn. Go to those training courses, **Know what to do... Then DO it!**

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