

Reducing Vehicle Accidents

There are three basic defensive driving skills that can be used to help prevent front- and rear-end vehicle accidents:

- 1. Scan the road ahead.** By simply watching the traffic situation like pedestrian activity, moving vehicles and parked vehicles—which could potentially pull out from a space—you can anticipate the need to adjust your driving speed or even stop.
- 2. Make gradual stops.** Rear-end collisions—those in which your vehicle is struck from behind—can be avoided through gradual stops. There are countless reports of vehicle accidents which were caused by a sudden stop at an intersection, grade crossing, passenger stop, or in preparation for making a turn. If you make sudden and/or unexpected stops, the person operating the vehicle behind you may not have sufficient reaction time or stopping distance to prevent an accident. Many vehicle accident reports indicate that even though the first vehicle operator was able to stop, the following vehicles were not able to stop in time to prevent the accident.
- 3. Establish a safe following distance.** Perhaps the most frequently overlooked method of preventing front- and rear-end vehicle accidents is creating a safe following distance. The actual safe following distance will depend of the weight of your vehicle. For example, a fully loaded contractor's van or straight truck weighs far more than most private passenger vehicles and, therefore, needs a greater following distance. The recommended safe following distance for private passenger vehicles is three seconds. Thus, your following distance should be increased to four, five or even six seconds, depending on the weight of your vehicle and the load it is carrying.

Additionally, following distances need to be increased during inclement weather or if dangerous driving conditions exist. Many vehicle accident reports show that the vehicle slid on wet pavement.

To determine if you have established the minimum safe following distance, pick out a fixed object such as a speed limit sign or light pole. When the vehicle ahead of you passes that marker, begin counting the seconds until your vehicle is in line with the marker. Adjust your following distance accordingly. Practice performing the test so that you can better judge safe following distances under various speed limits and driving conditions.

Remember, a defensive driver will do everything possible to reasonably prevent a vehicle incident. By practicing the basic skills of making gradual stops, scanning ahead and maintaining safe following distances, you can protect yourself from injury, prevent injury to others, minimize vehicle and operational downtime, and minimize the expenses associated with vehicle accidents and insurance costs incurred by your organization.