



Driving Safety **GUIDE**

Eliminate Distracted Driving

Driving requires paying close attention to keep yourself and other drivers safe. Distracted driving accounts for more than eight deaths each day in America, as reported by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Distracted driving includes using a cell phone to talk or text, eating or interacting with others in your vehicle. Most states have laws to ban certain activities, such as phone use, but it is hard for law enforcement to impose them as nearly everyone on the road has a cell phone.

It's up to you to monitor your personal driving behavior. Not only will driving without distractions keep others safe, but it will help you be more aware of potentially dangerous situations.

THE THREE TYPES OF DISTRACTION

NHTSA defines distracted driving as “any activity that could divert a person’s attention away from the primary task of driving.” There are many actions that could be considered distractions, but they all fall into one of three categories.

- **Visual:** Anything that makes you take your eyes off the road;
- **Manual:** This involves taking your hands off the wheel; and
- **Cognitive:** Anything that takes your mind off driving.

Experts consider texting while driving especially hazardous because it combines all three types of distraction.

AVOIDING TECHNOLOGY

Vehicles are loaded with electronic distractions that tempt Americans to take their eyes off the road. The American Automobile Association offers these tips to avoid distractions:

- Make the adjustments to GPS systems, power seats and your sound system before you take to the road. If certain situations arrive that demand readjustments, be sure to pull over in a safe area.
- Cell phones are only to be used in case of an emergency. Even a hands-free system can cause distractions if you are engaged in a conversation.
- Secure children and animals before hitting the road. Be sure to pull over in a safe area if they need attention.
- Try to eat before a trip. If you can't avoid eating in the car, make sure the foods you choose can be easily handled.



Keep Your Vehicle Safe

Ensuring your vehicle is in working order creates safer conditions for everyone. A sudden blowout or a defect in a vehicle's braking system can have disastrous results for drivers.

Pay attention to noises or dashboard lights. These are your vehicle's only way of alerting you to potential dangers.

TIRE LIFE

Driving on tires that are past their prime is extremely dangerous. While a new set can be expensive, they typically wear slowly enough to provide for expense planning. It is important to know what to look for when you are inspecting your tires.

Purchasing an inexpensive tire-depth gauge from a local auto parts store makes it an easy process. It is a simple way to make sure your tires are still safe for the road. The general rule is to change tires once tread is down to an eighth of an inch. Of course, depending on the road conditions in your area, you may choose to replace them more often.

Make sure you are replacing your tires to meet the specifications provided by your vehicle's manufacturer. Using different tires per wheel or replacing individually can cause uneven or premature wear.

CHECKING BULBS

With the help of another person, inspect the front and rear lights on your vehicle. Make sure you test both the high and low beams of your headlights, as well as your turn signals, tail-



lights, reverse lights and hazards.

Some bulbs can easily be replaced in your driveway. If you are inexperienced or have a hard-to-reach bulb, consider finding a professional local mechanic.

ADDRESSING ISSUES

Irregular noises and dashboard lights are good indicators that something is amiss. If you hear squeaking or grinding when you apply your brake, an inspection is required. A brake system that is

not working properly can put you and others at risk.

Most dashboard lights can be easily identified with a scanner. Bring your vehicle to a local auto-repair shop to diagnose the problem.

Lights and Your Safety

Your vehicle's lighting system is all about safety. Headlights do more than provide you with the light to see; they also make it easier for other drivers to see you coming. Turn and taillight bulbs are crucial as they help other drivers plan for your intentions to stop or turn.

Consider keeping spare bulbs that fit your vehicle in your emergency kit. Sometimes you may not be able to buy a new bulb when you realize one is not working. Bulbs are generally inexpensive, and having a spare can get you out of a jam.

HEADLIGHTS DURING THE DAY

If your vehicle doesn't feature automatic headlights, you should know the proper times your lights should be turned on. Each state has specific laws for daytime headlight use. Here are two of the most common laws per the American Automobile Association.

- Most states require headlights to be on any time your windshield wipers are in use. It is a good idea to activate your headlights any time there is rainfall, even if it is minimal.

- Turning your headlights on a half hour before sunset and a half hour after sunrise will keep you legal in nearly every state in America.

PROPER USE OF HIGH AND LOW BEAMS

Being respectful to other drivers on the road is a major factor in driving safety. When driving at night, pay attention to oncoming vehicles or ones



you are following. It is dangerous to leave your high beams on when passing or approaching, as the brightness of the lights make it difficult for the other driver to see.

According to the Department of Motor Vehicles, each state may require you to

switch from high to low beams when you are within a specific distance from an oncoming vehicle. Check with your local officials to learn your state's regulations.

Low beams are more effective in weather that limits visibility during the day, such as

fog or rain. Using your high beams can be dangerous due to the light reflection they create.

TURN AND STOP SIGNALS

These important signals are used to alert other drivers of your intentions. Be sure to

give plenty of warning before making a turn so other drivers can plan to slow down or change lanes.

Brake light bulbs that aren't working are dangerous as vehicles behind you may find it difficult to tell you are slowing down.

Keeping Teens Safe

Acquiring a driver's license is a huge accomplishment in your teen's life. While they will be ecstatic, parents may become struck with worry over their new independence. Teaching a new driver about safety on the road can ease some of the stress.

Take advantage of the time you have before your teen tests for his license. Going over study courses and leading by example while they are accompanying you on the road are great ways to instill safe driving habits.

Point out what other drivers are doing irresponsibly. Parental guidance leaves a lasting impression on a learning teen.

AVOIDING THE CELL PHONE

The Department of Motor Vehicles reports that studies have shown using a cell phone while driving is equally as dangerous as driving drunk. Everyone knows that drinking and driving is illegal, and most states also prohibit cell phone usage when behind the wheel.

Make sure your child knows a phone is for emergencies and to be used when safely parked.

An average text message causes a loss of focus on the road for 4.6 seconds. A lot can happen in under five seconds, especially when you consider that is about the amount of time it would take to drive the length of a football field. The road has many obstacles and being distracted by a phone can make them even more hazardous.



© FOTOLIA

OBEYING SPEED LIMITS

Speed limits are enforced to keep drivers safe on the road. Tell your teen to not feel pressured to keep up with speeding traffic. Speeding is a big factor in fatal-teen accidents on American highways.

Experts believe this is due to inexperience and peer pressure.

Explain to your child that even if speeding doesn't result in an accident, there also is the possibility of getting a costly speeding ticket. They

should be aware that you will not foot the bill and that their insurance premiums may skyrocket.

DRIVING SOLO

Give your teen some time to adjust to driving without your

supervision before you allow other passengers in the vehicle.

A full cab of teenagers can be distracting to a seasoned veteran, let alone someone who is just taking their first steps on the highways.

Drinking and Driving

Getting behind the wheel after alcohol use comes with some serious consequences. Some people think they can still safely operate a vehicle after a few drinks. This is not only irresponsible but can potentially take the innocent life of another driver.

STATISTICS

The use of alcohol reduces brain function and hinders clear thinking and muscle coordination. These three components are extremely important to safely operate a vehicle. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has a shocking report that should sway every driver from getting behind the wheel after drinking.

- 28 people in America die every day due to alcohol-related crashes. That's one person every 53 minutes.
- These deaths contribute to an annual cost of \$52 billion.
- There were 181 children age 14 and under killed in drunk driving accidents in 2015.
- Drinking and driving contributed to 10,265 deaths in 2015.

UNDERSTANDING BAC EFFECTS

BAC, or Blood Alcohol Concentration, is how levels of alcohol are measured in a person's blood. All 50 states in America deem that .08 percent is the absolute limit people are able to legally operate a vehicle. This is how different BAC levels effect different body functions as reported by



the NHTSA:

- .02 percent: Loss of some judgement, a sense of relaxation and an altered mood;
- .05 percent: Difficulty focusing your eyes, feeling less alert;
- .08 percent: Poor muscle coordination, impaired reasoning and judgement;
- .10 percent: Major loss of

reaction time, slurred speech and slower thinking; and

- .15% percent: Creates a major loss of balance, less muscle control and even vomiting.

CONSEQUENCES

Drinking and driving creates consequences even if you are not involved in an acci-

dent. If you are pulled over and deemed over the legal limit, you are in for expensive fines and legal fees.

Charges can range from a misdemeanor to a felony offense. Some penalties that can apply to a DUI case include loss of a driver's license, fines and even jail time. The national average for

a first-time offense is \$20,000.

Certain states are now requiring offenders to install an ignition interlock device in their vehicles. This cost for the installation also falls on the drunk driver. An on-board breathalyzer stops a vehicle from starting unless blood alcohol levels are under a pre-set low limit.

Child Passenger Safety

Keeping children safe while in a vehicle should be every parent's priority, as well as anyone who transports them. Driving with infants, toddlers or young children creates a greater amount of responsibility than traveling solo.

More than 600 children under the age of 13 lost their lives in American traffic accidents in 2015, per the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. The organization reminds drivers that proper use of restraining systems could greatly reduce this number in the years to come.

INSTALLING A CAR SEAT

Your child's car seat is his biggest defense in a traffic accident. Most seats are designed with a 5-point safety harness that spreads crash impacts to stronger parts of their developing bodies.

This harness cannot do its job properly if the seat is installed improperly. Remember these car seat installation tips from the Department of Motor Vehicles while installing a seat:

- Step 1: Read the instructions. It might surprise you how many parents just go for it without reading the owner's manual. Even if you are experienced in car-seat installations, each model may have a slightly different process to ensure security.
- Step 2: Car seats are to be installed in the back seat, as this is the safest place for a child to be during an accident.
- Step 3: Check your vehicle's

manual. Older vehicles may not have the lower anchors that are used to attach a car seat. The manual will tell you where the anchors are or if you should secure the seat with a safety belt.

- Step 4: Once all connections have been made, it's time to tighten the straps. Once positioned correctly, a seat should not move more than an inch in any direction.

- Step 5: A rear-facing seat should be at the correct angle to keep your infant's head still. A forward-facing seat will have a tether strap to secure above the seat to prevent head movement.

HOT CAR DEATHS

In 2016, nearly 40 children were the victims of heatstroke deaths in America from being left in cars. This is a totally preventable tragedy that should never happen.

Never leave a child alone in a car, even if you think it will be just for a minute. If a child is present, stick to drive-through services and paying at the pump. According to the National Safety Council, children overheat four times faster than adults.

If you ever see a child alone in a car, call 911 immediately.





Hazardous Conditions

Different weather conditions can impact how you can safely operate your vehicle. Areas that experience heavy snow or rain will deal with greater obstacles when driving in these conditions.

Learn to safely navigate the highways when hazards are present by being prepared and utilizing safety strategies.

PREPARE AN EMERGENCY KIT

Make sure your vehicle is

equipped with important components to keep you safe during extreme weather conditions. In case you are ever stranded, you should have the necessities to keep you safe until help arrives.

An extra battery or charging

device for your cell phone is a great tool to have, as these can speed up getting help to your location. Here are some other items the Department of Motor Vehicles recommends:

- **Cold weather:** If you will be traveling through snowy conditions, it is important to pack plenty of extra warm clothes. If your vehicle fails to operate or you become stuck, heat might be limited so you will want a good way to stay warm. You also should plan to bring plenty of food, water

and a first aid kit.

- **Hot weather:** When the temperatures are rising, you should increase the amount of water you have stored. Make sure you have plenty for passengers and even pets if they travel the highways with you. You also should consider extra fluids such as engine coolant to help an overheated engine make it to the next town for service. This can be a lifesaver if you ever break down on the interstate, miles away from help.

FOLLOWING DISTANCE

Slippery roads make it difficult for vehicles to slow down. You don't want to find yourself slamming on the brakes during a snow or rain storm, as your vehicle will likely slide. Be sure to keep a safe distance from other vehicles especially during wet weather.

Do not get in a hurry if an impatient driver behind you is riding too close.

Be patient and maintain the same speed so the other driver can pass you when possible.