

Driver Safety Letter

presented by



Back to Basics

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Even during the best of times, the most well-trained, safety-conscious commercial motor vehicle (CMV) driver is at risk of engaging in driving behaviors that could lead to a crash on today's crowded highways. Factor in the additional stresses arising from the COVID-19 pandemic – more cases erupting, more drivers returning to the road and mounting pressure on businesses to reopen – not to mention constantly changing health standards, unpredictable weather and road conditions, and driver inattention and you've got a situation tailor-made to test your focus, your confidence, and your skills. Truck safety experts at the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration recognize this and have put out the following list of safe driving tips – a return to basics to keep you – and other motorists – safe.

- 1. Drive Defensively:** Commercial drivers have to be constantly vigilant to detect unexpected road conditions, distracted drivers, and motorists who don't understand how commercial vehicles operate. Scan ahead about 15 seconds (a quarter mile on interstates, or one to two blocks in cities) for traffic issues, work zones, and other dangers. Check mirrors every 8-10 seconds to be aware of vehicles entering your blind spots.
- 2. Signal for Safety:** Signal and brake to give other drivers plenty of time to notice your intent. If you must pull off the road, use flashers, reflective triangles, and road flares to alert approaching drivers.
- 3. Know When to Slow:** Driving too fast for weather or road conditions or failing to slow down for curves or ramps create risks for spills and rollovers, as well as crashes.
- 4. Maintain Your Vehicle:** Make sure that pre-trip safety inspections are completed particularly for tires and brakes. Your life depends on them. Make sure your load is well balanced and secure, as a shifting load can cause a rollover or loss of control. Loose materials create road hazards.
- 5. Buckle Up:** Use your safety belt every time. Safety belts save lives, reduce injuries, and allow drivers to stay inside and in control of their vehicles in case of a crash. In 2014, 30% of truck drivers involved in fatal crashes were partially or totally ejected from their vehicles.
- 6. Stay Sharp:** Get enough rest; don't drive when you're fatigued, too ill to focus, or on medications (including over-the-counter medicine) that make you drowsy or dizzy.
- 7. Get the Right Trip Planning Info:** Stay up to date on weather and road conditions, detours, and mountainous routes in order to plan driving time. Be aware that non-commercial navigation systems and apps may not provide warning of height and weight limitations and other commercial vehicle restrictions.
- 8. Practice Work Zone Safety:** Work zones present many hazards, like lane shifts, sudden stops, uneven road surfaces, moving workers and equipment, and confused passenger vehicle drivers. In 2016, 27% of fatal work zone crashes involved at least one large truck compared to only 11% of all fatal crashes – so it's vital to take work zone safety seriously. Slow down, maintain extra following space, and to be prepared to stop. Obey all work zone signs and signals. Scan ahead for changing traffic patterns and be alert to vehicles entering your blind spots. Keep a sharp eye out for road workers and flag crews.
- 9. Never Drive Distracted:** Texting is among the worst driving distractions. The odds of being involved in a crash, near-crash, or unintentional lane deviation are 23.2 times greater for truck and bus drivers who are texting while driving. Research shows that drivers texting while driving took their eyes off the forward road for 4.6 seconds on average. At 55 mph, this equates to traveling 371 feet (more than the length of a football field) without looking at the road. It is illegal for a commercial driver to text while driving, and there are restrictions on using mobile phones (devices must be hands free and dialed using no more than one button). Eating, drinking, interacting with a navigational device, map reading, controlling a pet, or any other activity that takes focus off the road can also be a deadly distraction. If you must attend to an activity other than driving, get off at the next exit or pullover – it's not worth the risk.

The NPTC Monthly Driver Safety Letter, jointly sponsored by NPTC and CPC Logistics, Inc., is a Microsoft Word document that you can print out and post as is, if appropriate, or modify any way you wish to make it a better fit for your drivers, including adding your company logo. If you are already doing an in-house letter, you may find information here that you can cut and paste into your own letter. If you are interested in specific subjects, or have any comments/feedback, contact Tom Moore, CTP, at tmoore@nptc.org or (703)838-8898