

DEFENSIVE DRIVING BASICS THE DANGERS OF SPEED

For some, it's exhilarating to zip down the open road as fast as possible. Others think it's necessary because of poor time management before the trip began. For still others, speeding is part of a mindset that sees driving as a race with other vehicles for domination of the road.

But history shows that speeding is dangerous: when speed limits were cut to 55 in the 1970s, traffic deaths dropped off sharply. They rose again when the speed limit on the open road was raised back to 70. When you speed you put others on the road in danger as well as yourself. Why is speed so dangerous? Let's look at a few facts about speed.

Speed and Stopping Distance

Remember the formula for stopping distance: Reaction distance + braking distance = stopping distance. Reaction time—the time it takes your foot to move from the accelerator to the brake—is generally the same at any speed, but the distance you cover during that reaction time depends on your speed. The faster you're going, the further you'll travel before coming to a stop. At 55 miles per hour, your combined reaction distance and braking distance add up to around 200 feet. At 65 miles per hour it can take 300 feet—half again as far—to stop even under ideal traffic conditions. Failure to stop in time is one of the major causes of fatal collisions on the road.

Speed and Impact Force

Another reason not to speed is that speed translates into force in a collision. The force of a collision at a mere 30 miles per hour is equivalent to the force of jumping off a 10-story building. Bad enough, but survivable, if you're wearing a safety belt. At 50 miles per hour this force is quadrupled. Statistics show that the risk of being killed in a collision is twice as great at 65 miles per hour as it is at 55 miles per hour. At 75 miles per hour, the risk is tripled.

Speed and Cost

Speed is not only dangerous, it's costly—both to your wallet and to the environment. Studies show that steady travel at 55 miles per hour can yield a savings of up to 38 percent in fuel costs and 40 percent on overall maintenance. And these days with our concerns about pollution, it makes environmental sense to use fuel as efficiently as possible.

Give Yourself Time To Slow Down

Many people end up speeding because the time they allow for their trip is the time the trip takes under ideal conditions with no traffic. Why not start adding extra time to all your routine trips so you don't get caught behind schedule?

It can be hard to stick to the speed limit when everyone else is speeding, but it's not impossible. You can make the decision to behave safely and lawfully, even if others don't.