

DEFENSIVE DRIVING BASICS EVASIVE MANEUVERS

A car stops suddenly in front of you.....or an oncoming vehicle strays into your lane.....or a frightened animal bounds onto the road.....

You know you are a good driver. But are you prepared for action when the unexpected or someone else's poor driving puts you in a tight spot? Keep these principles in mind:

Maintain an Escape Route

Try not to get boxed in when driving on multi-lane roads. That way if someone makes a wrong move, you'll be able to go left or right rather than having to stop dead in your tracks. On a two-lane road, your escape route is to the right, off the roadway. Watch for roadside hazards that can make this difficult. Adjust your speed so you meet up with oncoming cars at a spot where you have room to maneuver.

Use Brakes Carefully

The impulse in a dangerous situation is to hit the brakes. If your vehicle is not equipped with anti-lock brakes, slamming on the brakes can cause you to skid completely out of control. Press the brakes evenly and smoothly, backing off the brakes slightly if the wheels start to lock up. This way you'll slow down without losing control

If your vehicle has anti-lock brakes, do not stab at the brakes but apply firm pressure until the vehicle comes to a stop.

Swerve, Don't Brake

Whenever possible, use your steering wheel instead of your brakes. Be prepared to swerve around an unexpected obstacle. Drive with your hands on the left and right sides of the wheel (at "9 and 3 o'clock"), so you have leverage to turn it 180 degrees in either direction while keeping your hands firmly engaged. Be prepared to swerve sharply and then return the wheel to its normal position as quickly as you swerved. Guide your vehicle back to the path it was following before the emergency. If necessary, go right off the road to avoid hitting a vehicle head-on. Even going into a ditch is better than a head-on collision.

When It's Best to Speed Up

Sometimes you can get out of a jam by speeding up. If you're already in an intersection and someone is coming at you from the side, it's best to step on the accelerator rather than slamming on the brakes. If you did stop suddenly, you could not only lose control and swerve into oncoming traffic, but you could also be hit by the car coming from the side and the one behind you.

Making a Hard Choice

What if you can't avoid hitting something? Even then, you may have some choices. If you have a chance to choose what you hit, the best thing to hit is something soft, like bushes or shrubs. The next best choice is a vehicle that is moving in the same direction as you. Pick a stationary object rather than one that is coming at you. A target that will absorb energy, such as a parked car, is better than one that is rigid, such as a wall. Whatever you hit, try to sideswipe it rather than hit it head-on.

You can't control all that happens on the road. But being prepared for an emergency by driving defensively, keeping an escape route open, and knowing how to handle your brakes and steering wheel in an evasive maneuver can help you avoid becoming a victim of the unexpected.