

DEFENSIVE DRIVING BASICS CONDITIONS THAT AFFECT DRIVING

The conditions of driving are constantly changing. Light, weather, road conditions, traffic and the condition of your vehicle all have to be taken into account when driving. Consider the conditions that might affect your next road trip, and how you can respond to them.

Vehicle

- Tires in good shape and properly inflated?
- Area under engine free of leaks?
- Oil and other fluid levels adequate?
- Lights working properly?
- Brakes functioning?

Light

- Driving at night? Slow down and increase following distance.
- Driving into the sun? Reduce your speed and use your sun visor and sunglasses. Make sure your windshield is clean, both inside and out.

Weather

- Rain, snow or fog causing poor visibility? Slow down and increase your following distance according to the extent of the hazard.
- Roads wet or icy? Add even more following distance. Slow down to avoid hydroplaning on wet roads or skidding on ice. Slow to a crawl if necessary and turn on your flashing lights. Avoid sudden moves or hitting the brakes hard.
- Wind? Steering and acceleration can be difficult in a headwind. Crosswinds can cause you to swerve suddenly. And tailwinds can boost your speed without your being aware of it. Slow down and take a firm grip on the steering wheel.

Road

- Narrow or winding road with blind curves and intersections? Slow down and be alert for unexpected hazards such as stalled vehicles, vehicles entering from side roads or driveways and stopped school buses.
- Road flat, wide and straight? Watch out for "highway hypnosis".
- Construction zone? Slow down and prepare to stop. Watch for changes in road surface. Obey instructions from road crew.

Traffic

- Heavy city traffic? Scan the road for pedestrians, stopped vehicles, turning vehicles. Be prepared to stop.
- Fast-moving traffic? Move with the flow of traffic. On the freeway, drive in the right lane to avoid exceeding the speed limit.
- Many trucks and buses? Increase your following distance. Avoid passing if possible. Allow extra leeway when passing.

There's one other condition we haven't discussed here: the condition of the driver. To be safe in all driving conditions, never get behind the wheel unless you're calm, rested and sober.