

Location _____ Trainer _____ Date _____

DEFENSIVE DRIVING: AWARENESS IS KEY

The professional driver needs to be prepared to face the challenges and dangers of the road. Practicing defensive driving skills is one way to help prevent crashes. Driving defensively means the driver:

- Stays alert to changes by looking well ahead, to the sides, and behind.
- Keeps a constant visual scan going.
- Observes the entire situation.
- Recognizes potential hazards.
- Decides on an appropriate response.
- Carries out his/her plan.

VISUAL SCANNING. Visual scanning is a key component when it comes to avoiding hazards. This means scanning the entire area:

Ahead: Scan the entire sight area, looking about 12 to 15 seconds ahead of the vehicle. In the city, 12 to 15 seconds is equal to about two or three blocks. On the highway, it's equal to just over one quarter of a mile. This should provide enough time to spot a problem, decide how to react, assess traffic conditions, and maneuver out of the potential problem situation. When scanning ahead, pay special attention to anything that could affect the path of travel such as:

- Other vehicles
- Road signs
- Traffic signals
- Debris
- Animals
- Weather-related hazards (ice, snow, etc.)
- Intersections
- Work/construction zones
- Stopped vehicles
- Emergency vehicles
- Accidents

Sides: Scan to the left and right by using the vehicle's mirrors as well as periodically looking through the side windows. Although scanning to the sides is crucial to safe driving, its importance is even greater in certain situations including at intersections, when changing lanes or merging, in school zones, or in other places where people could dart unexpectedly into traffic.

Behind: Using the mirrors to monitor the rear of the vehicle is also important. As well as watching for vehicles and potential hazards, check for load and cargo security and watch for tire problems (flat, on fire, etc.).

A safe driver continually scans ahead, to the sides, and to the rear of his/her vehicle. He/she maintains a constant visual scan, never staring at a single object or in a single direction.

INTERSECTIONS. Crossing an intersection with a long vehicle can be a difficult maneuver. The first thing to remember is that due to the vehicle's additional length and slower acceleration (compared to an automobile) it takes longer to cross and clear intersections. Crossing an intersection at night presents additional hazards. Approaching drivers may not see the side of a long vehicle. The driver of a large vehicle needs to recognize these problems and take extra care when crossing an intersection.

At an intersection or unmarked crossing, always stop and assume you do not have the right of way. After stopping, proceed slowly, allowing for an additional stop before crossing. Look to the left, then right, then left again before pulling into the intersection. The approach at a controlled intersection is very similar. Stop two times. First, at the stop sign or light, then again after easing forward to a point where oncoming traffic can be seen clearly. When a traffic light turns yellow when approaching a crossing, slow down and stop.

MERGING. The weight of a vehicle's load as well as the ramp's length and degree of turn will determine how much time is needed to get the vehicle up to speed to safely merge with oncoming traffic. The size of the vehicle will determine how much space is needed to enter traffic. When entering traffic:

- Size up the traffic.
- Signal early.
- Watch for an opening.
- Build up speed to merge smoothly.
- Watch all mirrors.
- Watch for oncoming traffic.

When leaving an expressway:

- Signal and get into the turn lane as soon as possible.
- Check mirrors to monitor the speed of the traffic that is behind.
- Shift down to a lower gear and make the exit.