Risks of Tailgating Fact Sheet

HS04-063A (10-04)

Many drivers have experienced the frustration of traveling behind another vehicle moving slower then them and then following closer then they should. This practice, commonly referred to as "tailgating", is risky and can lead to a rear-end collision or other accidents.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), rear-end collisions account for approximately 23 percent of all motor vehicle crashes, resulting in approximately 2,000 deaths and 950,000 injuries. Many rear-end collisions are caused by tailgating. It is estimated that the average driver brakes 50,000 times a year to avoid a rear-end collision.

What Happens When We Tailgate?

When drivers tailgate they significantly reduce their stopping distance—or the distance needed to come to a complete and safe stop. What many drivers don't realize is that stopping distance is directly proportional to the size and weight of the vehicle. For example, the stopping distance is much longer for a heavy truck than it is for a passenger vehicle, such as a car. In fact, it takes about twice the distance to stop a heavy truck than it does a car.

Other critical driving elements drivers sacrifice when tailgating are perception and reaction times. Perception and reaction times are two separate intervals of time. Perception is the time needed to see and process a roadway hazard, while reaction time is the time needed for a driver's body to physically react to their brain's perception. When a driver tailgates they significantly reduce both. According to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, it takes alert drivers approximately two seconds to see a roadway hazard and react to it. The more space a driver allows between their vehicle and the vehicle in front of them, the more time they have to see a hazard and react safely.

Texas Workers' Compensation Commission
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Add Another Second

A driver's best defense against becoming involved in a rear-end collision is to create a "safety cushion" by keeping at least two seconds between them and the vehicle in front of them. This allows time for the driver to perceive and react to a roadway hazard, ultimately, avoiding an accident. For added protection when driving in poor conditions, such as driving at night, in bad weather, in heavy traffic and through roadway construction, drivers should upgrade to four seconds.

Remember to practice safety; don't learn it by accident.

This fact sheet was produced with information from the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety and the Texas Workers' Compensation Commission.

The Texas Workers' Compensation Commission has the following safe driving publications available for download from their website at www.twcc.state.tx.us:

- Fleet Motor Safety Program
- How Risky is Your Driving at Work?
- Are you Road Ready? Checklist
- Building a Highway Safety Program
- Vehicle Checklist
- Driving Distractions
- Road Rage
- Defensive Driving
- Driver Fatigue and Road Trance
- Driving in the Fog
- How to Prevent Roadway Crashes
- Jump Starting a Car Battery
- Safe Vehicle Backing
- Tips for Driving with ABS
- Driving in the Cone Zone
- Night Blindness
- Safe Driving
- Vehicle Battery Safety

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