

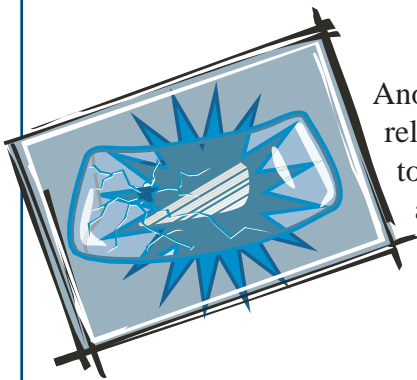
MAINTAIN A SAFE FOLLOWING DISTANCE

One of the most frequent and most severe claims in the human services field is the result of one vehicle rear ending another. Rear ending claims are often caused by improper following distance.



Following Distance

Following Distance is simply the distance between your vehicle and the one ahead of you, and it is the easiest defensive driving technique for a driver to implement. In addition to reducing the chance that you will rear-end another driver, increased following distance is an effective method to deal with tailgaters and reduce your chances of being hit from behind. Never tap the brakes to encourage the tailgater to pass, as this creates an unnecessary hazard and usually doesn't work. You should gradually slow down by taking your foot off of the accelerator and increase your following distance by following the methods outlined below. By doing so, you will reduce the chance that you will need to make a sudden stop while reducing the likelihood that the tailgater will hit you.



Another type of accident that can be reduced by increasing your following distance relates to cracked windshields. Often, cracked windshields are attributed to rocks hitting the windshield. Because these rocks are kicked up by vehicles ahead, increased following distance can provide additional time for the rock to land back on the pavement, as opposed to hitting your windshield.

Out with the Old

In the past, maintaining a decent following distance was determined by leaving one 'car-length' between you and the vehicle in front of you for every 10 miles per hour of speed. For example, if you are traveling at 50 mph, you would want to leave five car-lengths. This practice is no longer encouraged because it can be inconsistent and extremely unsafe. It does not take into account what a car-length is, which makes it easy for drivers to have varying perceptions of what constitutes a car-length. One driver may use five compact car-lengths while another may use five SUV car-lengths.

In with the New

The newer and safer distance method uses time to determine the distance between your vehicle and the one ahead, which reduces the risk of misjudgments. You time your following distance in seconds, and the number of seconds varies with the size of the vehicle and the road conditions.

Next time you are behind the wheel, try the suggested timing method.

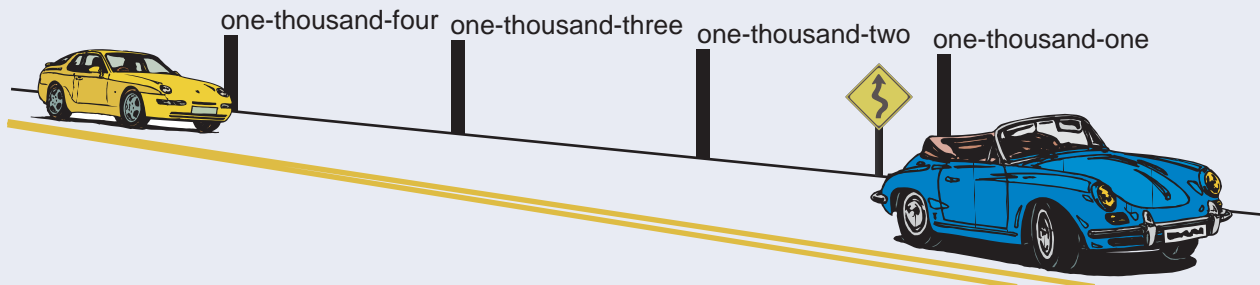
You will not only ensure the safety of your passengers, but yourself as well.

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Now that you know how to estimate the distance between your vehicle and the one in front of you, here are the appropriate times that need to be maintained.

How to Time Your Following Distance:

1. When the rear bumper of the vehicle ahead of you passes a stationary object, (e.g. a sign or bridge) start counting "one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two, etc."
2. Stop counting when your front bumper comes to the same stationary object.
3. The number you counted to equals the number of seconds between the two vehicles.

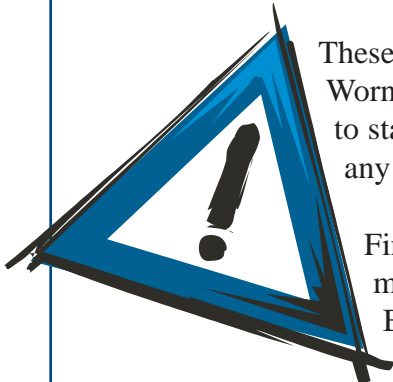


Times under Ideal Conditions:

- Cars - A minimum following distance of at least three (3) seconds
- Vans, Pick-ups and SUVs - A minimum following distance of four (4) seconds
- Always add one or more second for every condition that is not ideal

What conditions are not ideal?

- Fully loaded van
- Wet, snowy roads
- Leaves on road
- Limited visibility **add three more seconds*
- Icy roads **add three more seconds*
- Being tailgated
- Night driving



These following distance rules assume that your vehicle is in safe operating condition. Worn tires or brakes that are not working properly can reduce your ability to stop. Prior to starting any trip, it is important to complete a pre-trip inspection. Promptly report any problems.

Finally, remember to observe everything that is going on around you. Check your mirrors every 3-5 seconds, scan ahead and be aware of what lies in your blind spots. By knowing what is going on around you, you can adjust your following distance according to the ever-changing hazards around you.