



SAFETY TIP

Creating A Safety Cushion Safety Tip: the 3 second rule that could save your life

When you are driving, every second counts. We generally think of stopping or avoiding a hazard in terms of space but what really matters is how much time you have to react to hazardous situations. Yet most drivers are putting themselves at risk by looking, on average, only 40 feet ahead. Not knowing what hazards may be developing farther down the road significantly reduces drivers' time to respond to dangerous situations in a safe, controlled manner. The LOOKING techniques (proper use of vision) covered in Driving Dynamics "See the Advantage™" curriculum are designed to provide drivers with the ability to search and identify potential hazards. But there is one additional technique drivers must consistently use to achieve a higher level of safety. It is commonly referred to as a "Safety Cushion." This tip describes how to apply a simple technique to maintain adequate time; reducing exposure to unwarranted incidents.

So, what is a safe following distance? It is the space that provides the amount of time a driver needs to quickly react to changing traffic conditions and hazards. In other words, it is the following interval between you and the vehicle in front of you.

Consider this - it takes about one and half seconds to notice a problem in front of you and another one and half seconds to react, apply the brakes and slow down. That's a total of 3 seconds. Knowing this, safety experts have determined that the best way to make sure you're not following others too closely is to use, as a minimum, the "3 Second Rule." Additional seconds may be required to address deteriorating road conditions and the type of vehicle you drive. Let's look at how to determine and apply the 3 Second Rule.

Determining a safe following distance

- PICK A MARKER**
When following a vehicle, pick an overhead road sign, a tree or other roadside marker.
- TIME IT**
When the vehicle ahead passes that marker, see how many seconds it takes (slowly count, one thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three) for you to pass the same spot.
- 3**
DON'T FOLLOW TOO CLOSE
If it is not at least three seconds, increase your following distance.
- MODIFY AS NEEDED**
It's important to remember that the three-second rule is recommended for ideal road conditions and should be adjusted for adverse weather or reduced visibility.

Basically, all you do is count the seconds from the time the vehicle ahead of you passes something stationary (a road sign, a tree, any clear marker will do) and when *you* pass it. You want your following interval to be a minimum of 3 seconds. If it takes you 3 seconds to pass an object after the vehicle ahead of you has passed it, you're at a safe following interval. If it's less, slow down until you've regained your 3 second safety cushion. This will provide you with the ability to safely respond to potential hazards ahead of you *provided* that you are also LOOKING farther ahead to spot potential problems; giving yourself plenty of advanced notice to figure out what to do next.



As mentioned, there will be situations when you need to add additional seconds to your measurement. In bad weather your tires lose traction with the road, so you need to give yourself more time to stop. Depending on the severity of the road conditions (for example, rain or snow), increase the duration of time between passing objects to 5 or 6 seconds so you can feel more confident in your ability to stay safe.

Next, let's look at the recommendations for increasing the number of seconds based on the type of vehicle you are operating. Braking distances are significantly affected by the size and weight of a vehicle. The following are the recommended time allowances:

- Passenger Vehicle: 3 seconds
- SUV/Pick-up/Van: 4 seconds
- Truck/Cargo Van: 5 seconds
- Tractor-Trailer: 6 seconds

Remember, these are the minimum guidelines. Road, traffic, and weather conditions may require additional seconds to be added into your safety cushion.

Safe, defensive driving is always the smart choice. Nobody wants to be involved in a crash, and the best way to avoid it is to always employ defensive driving techniques. Part of this is maintaining a safe time interval between you and the vehicle in front using the timing guidelines provided in this safety tip.

This Safety Tip is part of the "SEE the Advantage™" advanced performance, driver safety training curriculum developed by DRIVING DYNAMICS. These driver safety training principles and techniques are rooted in research which determined that 90% of all traffic crashes can be avoided when the driver has just one more second to react and knows what to do with that additional one second.

