



RISK REMINDER

December 2020

Preventing Accidents

Professional drivers understand that the size and weight of large commercial vehicles create unique challenges that can be managed by exercising good judgment and employing defensive driving techniques. They understand the importance of maintaining a safe following distance, how excessive speed can jeopardize their ability to maintain control of their vehicle, the need to yield the right-of-way, and how to compensate for blind spots. Understanding these skills can help professional drivers manage speed and space effectively and keep them from endangering themselves and the lives of others around them. Here are some tips safety professionals recommend for managing speed and space:



- **Scan the road ahead.** Pay attention to the geometry of the roadway, such as curves and downgrades. Be aware of traffic entering and leaving the roadway. Monitor traffic far out in front of you for brake lights or other indications that a hazard lies ahead. Watch for stopped or disabled vehicles that may be blocking the roadway--a school bus, pedestrians, or construction crew may be just around the corner.
- **Use extra caution during inclement weather.** Adjust your speed to match road conditions. Driving on a wet or icy roadway can increase stopping distance significantly. Be prepared for other drivers who may lose control of their vehicles. Remember that a roadway can be extremely slippery immediately after it begins raining, when road oils are brought to the surface. Use your mirrors to monitor traffic on both sides and to the rear of your vehicle. Leave yourself a way out whenever possible.
- **Maintain a safe following distance.** According to the National Safety Council, under good conditions, the rule of thumb for calculating the ideal following distance for large commercial vehicles is to maintain one-second following distance for each ten feet of vehicle length plus one second for speeds over 40 mph. For example, the driver of a 60-foot tractor-trailer traveling 55 mph should maintain a seven-second following distance. To determine whether you are maintaining a safe following distance, select a fixed object, such as a telephone pole, by the side of the road. When the vehicle ahead of you passes the pole, begin counting the number of seconds that elapse before you pass the pole. The number of seconds you count should be equal to or greater than the safe following distance recommended for your vehicle and speed. Following distance should be increased accordingly during inclement road or weather conditions.
- **Know how long it will take to stop.** Stopping distance is determined by four factors:
 1. Perception time
 2. Reaction time
 3. Brake-lag time
 4. Time it takes to stop the vehicle once the brakes have engaged.

The time it takes to recognize a hazard, react, and apply the brakes can easily take three seconds. Taking this into account, at 60 mph your vehicle will travel approximately 255 feet before the brakes engage. Your vehicle will travel an additional 200 feet after the brakes begin to slow you down, bringing your total stopping distance to 455 feet, seven times the length of an average tractor-trailer.

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