

Decision Driving® Tactics: Plan an Escape Route

Risk Control from Liberty Mutual Insurance



Highlights:

- The easiest way to ensure an escape route is to maintain a safe following distance
- Before you pass, three questions to ask
- Decision Driving: five things to keep in mind

If there is a Decision Driving tactic that really separates the good driver from the average driver, it is planning an escape route. The easiest way to ensure that you always have an escape route is to maintain a safe following distance. It gives you the time and distance needed to come to a complete stop or safely maneuver around a hazard.

The Timed Interval Rule will help you determine the correct following distance under normal road and weather conditions. The rule is to allow a minimum of 4 seconds of space between your vehicle and the one you are following. For vehicles over 40 feet, add 1 additional second for each 10 feet (or portion of 10 feet) of vehicle length.

Let's say you are operating a tractor with a 53 foot trailer resulting in a vehicle 65 feet long. Under normal conditions, you should allow at least 7 seconds of following time between you and the vehicle ahead. In other words, the interval between the time the rear of the vehicle ahead passes a fixed point and the time the front of your vehicle reaches that same point should be at least 7 seconds. In bad weather or poor driving conditions, you will need to double or triple your following distance.

An escape route is also important when you are stopped in traffic. Always stop where you can still see the point at which the rear tires of the vehicle ahead touch the road. Without this decision space, the other vehicle might roll back and strike your vehicle, or you may be unable to move around it without backing up.

Passing

A frequent cause of head-on collisions is improper passing. Before attempting to pass, ask yourself three questions. If the answer to any of them is no, do not pass!

1. Is there a long term advantage for me to pass?
2. Do I have enough power to pass quickly and safely?
3. Is there space available for me to pass and return to the proper lane safely?

The third question is where you need to consider your escape path. Without sufficient space you could find yourself trapped in the wrong lane, facing a head on collision.

As a Decision Driver, you should:

- Plan an escape route that leaves you an "out" if other drivers make mistakes.
- Understand that an ideal escape route provides an adequate amount of clear decision space all around your vehicle.
- Develop a good escape route by studying the surrounding traffic patterns and using visibility, time, and space to your advantage.
- Allow time and room to take decisive action, such as speeding up, slowing down, or moving to either side.
- Never let your own safety depend entirely on other drivers.



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