

FLEETING IDEAS

DEVELOP THE SPACE CUSHION HABIT

Professional drivers recognize that maintaining an adequate space cushion all around your vehicle is a basic element of defensive driving. A space cushion “bubble” keeps you from getting into a position where an impact is unavoidable. Develop the space cushion habit to have time to recognize accident-producing situations and react safely in a timely manner.

- Under normal weather conditions and on busy streets, a following distance of three or more seconds allows you to check your mirrors, maintain proper eye lead time, check both ways at intersections, and most importantly you will have time to stop if the car ahead slams on brakes.
- Since the invention of the wheel, drivers have tried to answer the question – “should I stop for that yellow light or should I go for it?” If you are maintaining a proper following distance, the answer is almost automatic. Half of your following distance should be enough time/distance to stop.
- At highway speeds with normal weather conditions, a following distance of three to five seconds allows you to safely change lanes, merge into traffic at entrance and exit ramps, maintain proper eye lead time and protects you from rear-end collisions.
- Following distance is the primary concern but don’t forget your cushion to the side and rear. Slow down in neighborhoods and watch for driveways and children playing in or near the street. When you are being tailgated, lengthen your following distance so that you can stop gradually.
- When weather and road conditions worsen, adjust your following distance to maintain control of the driving situation. In snow, ice, fog or rain, the normal following distances must be lengthened. The general rule of thumb is to start with a 3-second following distance and add one second for each additional hazard. For example, night, rain, and heavy traffic

would add three seconds, bringing you to a 6-second following distance.

To establish a proper following distance, start counting “one thousand one...one thousand two...one thousand three” when the vehicle ahead passes a stationary object. If the front of your vehicle passes the same object before the three-plus count is completed, you’re too close.



Key Points

- Maintain a “safety bubble” all around your vehicle. Be alert for other vehicles passing, changing lanes, or merging into traffic. Be alert for children or pedestrians around parked vehicles.
- Maintaining an adequate following distance is a basic element of defensive driving. Professional drivers recognize accident-producing situations early enough to avoid them.
- Adjust your speed and following distance to the conditions around you by allowing one additional second for each hazard: light, traffic, road, type/condition of vehicle, driver’s condition, etc.

Review of following distance:

1. Select a stationary object ahead of the vehicle you are following.
2. When the vehicle ahead passes that object, begin counting, “one thousand one...one thousand two...one thousand three...”
3. If the front of your vehicle passes the same object before the three-plus count is completed, you’re too close.