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Increase your following distance and minimize distractions to prevent rear-end collisions

Following too closely, no matter what your speed, is a very aggressive driving behavior. It puts you in danger because you're less likely to stop in time if the vehicle in front slows. It might also provoke the driver of the vehicle being tailgated to do something unexpected in anger. Following too closely also results in loss of control and rollover accidents when a driver takes evasive action to avoid a collision. It is critical that drivers maintain an adequate following distance to prevent accidents.

It is important that drivers maintain adequate distance behind other trucks as well. Tailgating a truck greatly reduces your ability to scan ahead, in addition to limiting your ability to stop in time.



What is an adequate following distance?

An adequate following distance provides a driver time to perceive a hazard, react by applying the brakes, and safely stop. The actual stopping distance of a truck depends on many factors including the weight of the truck and its load, brake design, condition of brakes and tires, road surface, and weather conditions.

All trucks should maintain a minimum following distance of three seconds with larger trucks requiring additional distance. The most common truck following distance formula, recommended by the National Safety Council, and most state commercial drivers' license manuals, is based on truck length and



Tailgating another truck significantly reduces your ability see and react to changing traffic.

speed. It recommends one second for each 10 feet of vehicle length at speeds under 40 miles per hour. For speeds above 40 miles per hour, one second is added for the additional speed.

For example, a 40-foot truck-trailer combination would require four seconds under 40 miles per hour and five seconds above 40 miles per hour. This formula is based on ideal driving conditions. Additional seconds are added for heavier vehicles/loads, reduced visibility, rain, ice, snow, or other inclement weather.

How do you tell if you are the correct distance behind another vehicle? Pick an object the vehicle in front of you is about to pass, such as the guardrail in the photo to the left. When the vehicle in front of you passes that object, begin counting "one-one-thousand, two-one-thousand, three-one-thousand, four-one-thousand, five-one-thousand..." If you pass the object prior to the required seconds, you need to increase your following distance and count again.

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At highway speeds, this driver will not have time to stop safely if the vehicle in front slows unexpectedly. Increase your following distance to provide adequate time to perceive and react to changing situations and to stop your truck.

Next time you hop in your truck test the procedure. Most safe drivers will find this distance is a length they already try to maintain. We all realize that maintaining a safe following distance is a moving target as cars will cut in front of you or traffic will slow down in front of you. In most cases, these vehicles will pull away from you, but if they do not, you will have to slow to increase your following distance.

Remember to increase your following distance during inclement weather such as rain, snow, and ice and during times of reduced visibility.

Speeding and Distractions.

The following distance formula is based on drivers maintaining legal speeds and being entirely focused on their driving. Speeding greatly reduces your ability to stop in time as a truck's total braking distance is longer at higher speeds. Drivers need to drive within the legal speed limit.

The ability of a driver to stop in time is greatly impacted by a driver's ability to perceive and react to the situation. Drivers who are distracted or not paying full attention will have longer perception and reaction times — increasing their likelihood of a rear-end collision, loss of control, or rollover accident if the vehicles in front slows quickly. Drivers must keep their eyes focused on the forward roadway with regular, quick scanning of mirrors and blind spots.



Take care of distracting activities while safely parked. Distractions reduce your ability to perceive and react quickly to changing traffic conditions.

Performing secondary tasks such as talking on a cell phone, reading, eating, and reaching for objects in the cab are distracting and should be done when the truck is safely parked.

Drivers can reduce their chances of being involved in a rear-end collision by driving within the speed limit, staying focused on the roadway ahead, and by maintaining an adequate following distance.

Providing solutions to help our members manage risk.®



For your risk management and safety needs, contact Nationwide Loss Control Services: 1-866-808-2101 or LCS@nationwide.com.