

# MAFES Dawg Tracks



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*Safety Tips: Be  
Aware & Arrive Alive*



Our Extension Division employees probably “rack up” more road miles than the rest of the university put together. We exemplify the rules to safe driving by the fact that we have had a minimum of accidents in vehicles. However, no matter how safe we are and how much we talk about being safe on the road, there is always that other “dude” that we need to watch for. It’s really hard to predict the actions of the other drivers out on our highways.

## We should take a look at some of the reasons for driver errors:

- The 2-second following distance between vehicles is taught now in many drivers’ schools. It’s more than enough. The 2-second recommendation was derived from testing the stopping distance and reaction time of drivers under ideal road, vehicle and driver conditions. Early on, I was taught to allow 1- car length for each 10 miles per hour that we were driving. I haven’t heard of this rule in years.
- The problem with both of these recommendations is that when you are dropping off to allow for these other vehicles, inherently some character is going to cut in on you. We think that with these intrusions over the course of a day will abort our schedule arriving time at our destination. But the Smith System, operators of driving training, has done research on this issue. They found that, by adding a .5 second time element for the car length, using a figure of this event happening 40 times a day (@2.5 seconds), the total loss time would only be 100 seconds. This is assuming that all vehicles remain in the same lane. Other vehicles will change lanes, so this time element probably will be less than 100 seconds, because of other vehicles changing lanes will allow us to speed up a little.
- Smith Systems recommends allowing 4-seconds between vehicles. This is how they recommend to measure this distance: When the vehicle in front of you passes a fixed object such as a utility pole or an overpass- count to 1-thousand-1, 1 thousand-2. You should get to 1-thousand-4 before passing the same fixed object. This figure should increase during poor weather or road conditions or when you’re driving heavier equipment.
- The truth is: The biggest barrier to maintaining the recommended distance is just our own pre-existing tendencies. It is instinctive for most drivers to actively fill space, not create it. We should practice this 4-second rule and see how the visibility increases and the risk potential is reduced. According to Road Trip America, a popular travel consulting agency, about 50,000 people die each year in vehicle collisions on US roadways. Another estimated 22 million people are injured in collisions. The costs associated with these figures are a staggering estimate of \$80 billion.

## Following are some rules or tips that if we practice them we can greatly reduce the potential for an accident:

- ✓ **Pay Attention** – “I never saw him,” the most common comment or excuse after a collision. Stay focused on the road and your driving!
- ✓ **Yield Anyway** – “Nobody ever yielded themselves into a collision.” It is hard to yield when the other vehicle is the one that should be yielding.
- ✓ **Don’t Trust anybody** – This could be coupled with the one above- Don’t rely on the other vehicle- Watch out for him and maintain control of your own.
- ✓ **Look Down the Road** – Keep your eyes on the road, your mind focused on driving defensively and courteously.
- ✓ **Avoid Distractions** – When we assume our driving “duties,” one of the most important ones is that we be responsible for our actions and the results of those actions. In most collisions, a driver involved in a collision had the opportunity to avoid the collision if he was cognizant of his focus on driving alone and not “thinking of other activities.”
- ✓ **Get Rid of “tailgaters”** – Most driving instructors will tell you not to tailgate other vehicles for several reasons. Following too closely is a factor in about 40% of collisions. Many of them aren’t minor in terms of injuries and fatalities. Following too closely often restricts your vision.
- ✓ **Don’t drive impaired** – Impairment covers a lot of issues including under the influence of drugs or alcohol. It can also alter your thinking if you have not rested sufficiently, taken your medications correctly or even had sufficient sleep to remain alert.
- ✓ **Chill Out** – Driving safely is all about attitude. When the other vehicle cuts you off, our inclination is to get back at him. This is the wrong attitude to take in defensive driving. As hard as it may seem, we should yield, let him have his way because in 10 minutes, you will have forgotten that it even happened. Besides, who is to say that another close incident may arise where you have to chill out to avoid a problem?
- ✓ **Don’t Speed** – Observe all speed limits! Driving above the speed limits increases your risk in 2 ways – You’re breaking the law, enhancing the potential for an accident to yourself or another vehicle. Secondly, you don’t have control over your vehicle functions, steering or braking, with excessive speeds.
- ✓ **Wear your seatbelt** – The automotive gurus say that the seatbelt is the most significant device ever invented. They provide impact protection, absorb crash forces, and keep you from being thrown out of the vehicle. Some dissidents will tell you that they are uncomfortable, they want to be thrown clear of the vehicle (a fallacy- 50% of crash deaths are caused by “thrown from the vehicle”), may get trapped.
- ✓ **Seatbelts save about 50% of vehicle deaths and injuries.**

*Don’t put your life on the line  
<>think safety<>  
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*Don’t learn safety by accident*

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Excerpts: [www.roadtripamerica.com](http://www.roadtripamerica.com)  
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