

MSU-ES Dawg Tracks



February, 2010 Defensive Driving II - Rules to Live By



We shall continue another month of defensive and safe driving. Again, for as many miles as we Extension folks accumulate in a year, time spent on all the facets of being and remaining safe can be justified easily.

Did you know that every year approximately 50,000 people die in roadway collisions and about 22 million are injured? The estimated cost for these injuries and fatalities approach \$80 million each year.

Mr. Robert Schaller, contributing editor for RoadTripAmerica, reiterates a fact that we should all be cognizant of, which is: Nearly all collisions are preventable. We shall continue to discuss some of Mr. Schaller's findings from teaching traffic law and defensive driving for over 15 years:

RULES TO LIVE BY -

- **Don't Run Red!** – Mr. Schaller states that in his hometown of Arizona, drivers run red lights approximately 120,000+ times each day. If we had statistics to back it up, we probably would be shocked at the number of lights that are violated in our city each day.

There are two basic types of red light runners - the daydreamer or distracted driver who doesn't see the light and the party who accelerates on the yellow signal instead of waiting an average of 45 seconds for the light to change.

What constitutes running a red light? It means that your vehicle has entered the intersection and the light is already red. All states vary as to where the boundaries for the intersection begin. We all should get familiar with law enforcement to discover where the boundaries actually start in our area, as most all states have varying rules on where the boundaries start. Some states rule that if you are in the boundary area when the light is on green or yellow, you are clear to move through the intersection. All states vary some in their definition of the intersection boundaries. We should get familiar with the laws that govern intersections in our states, especially with the advent of intersection light monitors.

The bottom line for all of us is to watch at these intersections and anticipate light changes to avoid the potential for an accident.

- **Chill Out!!** – Driving safely is all about attitude. If you have been driving for a long period of time, as most of us have, we know the rules. As we are doing now, a refresher periodically never hurts and can be a lot of help.

We know how to drive defensively, and we do it every day. Where our problem lies is in the fact that we don't realize or remain cognizant of the dangers involved with driving. Driving is such a normal part of our lives that we do it on "rote" memory and take so much of driving as our way of life and not about the dangers involved. It would do us good to think about the dangers involved occasionally.

It is easy for us to say and hard to practice it, but driving conflicts have been with us since the automobile came into existence. When an incident happens while you are driving, such as a vehicle "riding our back bumper too close" or someone passing us on the highway - and they cut too short in front to get back into the lane, human nature (at least with most of us) would like to force them over and perform an old fashioned "hissy fit" on them. However, as long as we are driving, conflicts will happen.

We can't control what the other vehicle does, but we can control how we react. If we let these incidents pass and keep focusing on proper driving for ourselves, most of the time it's forgotten in a few minutes. As we encounter these highway incidents, we should try to remember that we might make a mistake in our driving and would hope that they overlook our mistake so we can do the same. We surely need to use the "golden rule" while we are driving.

None of us are perfect and none of us drive perfectly, so let it pass. Many accidents occur when the operator is mad, frustrated, upset, or stressed or they encounter some other type of distraction. When we're out and about and have an encounter, we should pass it off as "it doesn't matter." **Try to keep our attitudes rational, calm and positive:**

- **Look Down the Road-** This means to keep your eyes up and focus on the road. Mr. Schaller determined that the average driver focuses only about 5 to 8 seconds ahead, where one should be looking about 15-20 seconds ahead. Our vision is the best tool for safe driving. We should be looking on both sides and behind us as well. Our peripheral vision serves as an "early warning system" by keeping our eyes moving and not "zeroing" in on one object.

Our vision is the single most important tool we have for driving. We must use it effectively. While driving, we should continuously be looking down the road, to the sides and behind us. In other words our eyes are our scanner to take in all that we see and analyze everything that is happening around us or close enough to be a hazard.

MOMMA DIDN'T RAISE NO FOOL!

DRIVE SAFELY & STAY COOL!!