

Safety Habits—Space and Speed Management

Basic vehicle safety is dependent on a vehicle's surrounding space and its speed. Like the space/time continuum of modern physics, these factors are interrelated and interdependent and therefore are discussed together here. Thankfully, these factors can be managed by the vehicle driver. This safety discussion will review the interrelationship of these factors and things drivers need to know to help manage them.

Modern physics may be able to postulate otherwise, but in our world of slower moving particles, two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Maintaining a cushion of safe space around your entire vehicle will help minimize accidents by keeping your vehicle and any other object from being together in the same space at the same time. Proper following distance (the distance you are behind other vehicles traveling in the same direction) is a function of speed and your ability to see those objects. Following the 4 second rule will help maintain the cushion of safety at the front of the vehicle. This rule doesn't require any complicated math or physics formula like the one noted above. Simply begin counting to four (i.e., one thousand and one, one thousand and two...) when you observe the vehicle in front of you pass a stationary object. If your vehicle passes that same object before you get to 4, you have not allowed enough following distance. Slow down to achieve 4 second following distance. Add a second to this distance for additional hazards such as darkness, slippery road condition, etc., you may encounter to ensure you will be able to stop should the vehicle in front of you stop suddenly.

Maintaining the cushion behind your vehicle is more difficult. First you need to continually scan your mirrors to detect what is in that space. A tailgater will require you to increase your following distance (see above), so you can slow down gradually to keep the following vehicle from hitting you. Allow these

tailgaters to pass, if possible. The cushion around the sides of your vehicle is maintained by limiting times you are traveling adjacent to other vehicles and avoiding their blind spots. If you can't see the driver of a semi truck in his side view mirrors, or can't see the rear view mirror of a car you are traveling adjacent to, you are driving in their blind spot and they can't see you. You also need to lean forward in your seat while looking in side mirrors and turn your head to detect others traveling in your blind spot before you turn to the right or left.

Proper placement of your vehicle at intersections is also part of space management. If you are turning, you should place your vehicle so that it is closer to the travel direction side of the lane. Keep your wheels straight while you wait in case you get rear ended. Also, stop with enough space between you and the vehicle in front of you. (You should be able to see the other vehicle's rear tires touch the road).

Your vehicle's speed is a function of various factors. As we have already noted, the distance between you and the vehicle in front of or behind you are two of those factors. Road conditions are another. Speed limit signs are established for providing you with the maximum safe speed during normal conditions/situations. Larger vehicles are advised to travel below the speed limit and speed should be reduced when conditions are not optimal. Your overall visibility also affects your speed. Night driving and driving in poor weather conditions limit your ability to see what hazards may be ahead. You should only drive at speeds within your sight distance.

Consider these tips on space and speed management next time you are behind the wheel. They will help lower your chances of being involved in an accident when others may not be managing these same factors.