

#1 IN A SERIES

DRIVING DANGERS

Handling hazardous situations behind the wheel.

By Mike Carpenter, Shell State Wholesale Manager



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The leading cause of death among Americans between the ages of 1 and 24 is motor vehicle crashes. And over 75% of the time the factors contributing to crashes are related to driver error. Advice on coping with sudden driving dangers is provided here. Learn from it and pass on that learning to someone else.

Q. It seems like more people are running red lights today. How can I protect myself from them?

A. By *never* assuming a green light means all okay. There's little consolation in knowing an accident isn't your fault just because you had the right of way. Your car is still damaged, and



someone may be hurt. Even though you were in the right, perhaps you could have actually avoided the collision simply by looking before you leap.

If your light is green, make sure other drivers, at or near the intersection, aren't trying to beat the yellow, or red.

If you're at an intersection without a light, look left, right, and *left again* before moving out.

Q. Blowouts are scary. Should I just slam on the brakes?

A. No. If you slam on the brakes you could lose control completely. If a front tire blows, the car will pull hard to the side of the blowout. The steering wheel vibrates like crazy. Hang on tight with your hands at the 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock positions on the steering wheel. Take your foot off the gas and concentrate on staying in your lane. Then slow down gradually and pull off the road to a safe location. If a rear tire blows, the back of the car will weave back and forth and vibrate. But you should handle it the same way.

Q. How do I get out of a skid?

A. A lot of people hit the brakes hard when their car starts to skid. That generally makes things worse. Just take your foot off the gas and turn your steering wheel in the direction you want the front of the car to go. This helps straighten out the car and often regains traction.

Frequently it takes more than one turn of the steering wheel to correct a skid.





Some state officials suggest the acronym POGO for this kind of situation. *Pop* your safety belt. *Open* the window. *Get* *Out*. See more detailed information in the answer below.

Q. If my car goes into deep water, what's the best way out?

A. While this doesn't happen often, it happens enough that you should know what to do. If you do go in the water, release your safety belt immediately. (But don't release it before you go in. The safety belt will help protect you during impact with the water.) Then the best thing to do is to try to get out quickly through the window, because power windows can short-circuit in the water. If you can't get out through the window, try the door. At first, the water pressure will probably hold it closed. But don't panic. As the water rises, it will equalize the pressure and the door should open.

Q. What if my brakes just go out. What then?

A. You must think and act quickly. Remember this word sequence: pump pedal, parking brake, shift down, safe place. 1. Pump the brake pedal. (Unless you have an ABS brake system. Never pump the brake pedal on ABS brakes.) Sometimes the pressure comes back. 2. Slowly try the parking brake. But don't jam it on hard if you're in a curve. That could cause a spin. 3. Shift into a lower gear (or lower range on automatic transmissions). The drag on the engine will help slow you down.



Do all three of these as quickly and steadily as you can. And keep your eyes on the road. 4. Look for a safe place to guide your vehicle onto the shoulder of the road or some other safe location. In an emergency, the quicker you think and act, the safer you'll be.

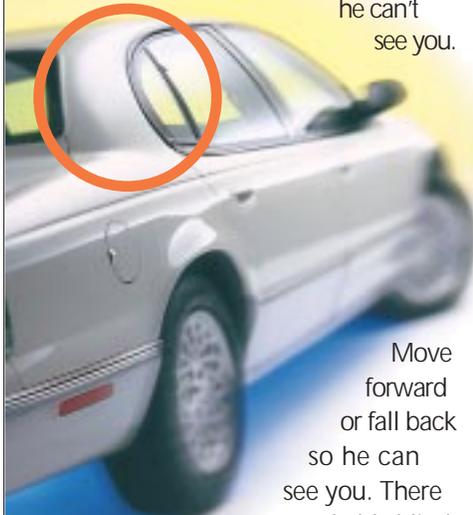
Q. What about Antilock Braking Systems?

A. ABS is basically a conventional braking system that is helped by computer technology. Sensors in each wheel let the computer know if all the wheels are turning at the same speed. The computer reads the data and, if needed, activates a solenoid valve so more or less force can be applied to help the car stop more evenly. If each wheel is not stopping with equal force, often a car can go into a spin. Or the driver can lose control. Under normal conditions, the antilock system will not be activated. However, should the braking force exceed the available adhesion between the tires and the road surface, the system will automatically activate. This will be recognizable by a rapid pulsation felt through the brake pedal. You should not pump the brake pedal at any time on an ABS system. Pumping could interrupt operation and actually increase stopping distance.

Q. Cars seem to pull over in front of me for no reason. Can I do anything about that?

A. Virtually all cars have “blind spots,” spots where it’s difficult to see cars close behind them to the left or right. To tell if you’re driving in someone’s blind spot, just glance at his rearview mirror. If you can’t see his face, assume

he can’t see you.



Move forward or fall back so he can see you. There are probably blind spots in your car too. That’s

why it’s always safer to quickly turn to visually check for other vehicles traveling in lanes next to yours before you pull over.



The Vampire Rule

Another place to check to see if you’re in someone’s blind spot is her outside mirror. If you can’t see the driver’s face, chances are she can’t see you.

Q. What if the accelerator sticks?

A. Try pulling it up with the toe of your shoe. If a passenger is with you, have him reach down and pull it up. You should not take your eyes off the road to reach down yourself. If your car has a manual transmission, press down on the clutch. The engine will continue to race, but you can then pull safely off the road. If it’s an automatic transmission, put it in neutral. It’s not a good idea to turn off the key. Some cars will lose power steering or even lock the steering wheel.

Q. I saw a hood fly open on a car on the freeway. What then?

A. The driver needs to stop, but if he slams on his brakes, he could be hit from behind. In some cars, from behind the wheel you can actually see ahead by peeking through the opening

between the dashboard and the hood. If not, then lean out the window to see what's ahead of you. In either case, you need to slow down smoothly and pull off the road.

Q. Suppose another car's coming right at me...what should I do?

A. Right is often the right way. Try to escape to the right if possible. Almost anything is better than a head-on collision. But if you move to the left, the oncoming driver might correct at the last minute and turn back in the direction you've just gone. While you're moving to the right, blow your horn. And if you can't avoid a collision, brake firmly and steadily. Every mile per hour you slow down will reduce the impact.

If a car starts to come at you, honk your horn, be prepared to swerve right, and brake firmly if need be. See why in the question and answer above.

Road Rage Is Real

Anger and driving don't mix. Behind the wheel is no place for aggression. But more and more people are letting their emotions get the best of them. One

10 Ways To Avoid Road Rage

Here are some suggestions from the AAA:

- 1 Be courteous behind the wheel.
- 2 Don't honk your horn excessively.
- 3 Don't block the passing lane.
- 4 Don't switch lanes without signaling first.
- 5 Don't take up more than 1 parking spot.
- 6 Don't let your door hit the car parked next to you.
- 7 Don't tailgate.
- 8 Avoid unnecessary use of high beam headlights.
- 9 Don't inflict your loud music on nearby cars.
- 10 Allow plenty of time for every trip.

report states that during the first six years of this decade, over 10,000 incidents of road rage were reported. People zigzagging in and out of traffic. Someone



cutting someone else off. Tailgating for long distances. All of these can lead to collisions, disputes, even death. Impatience is one of the prime causes. It leads to risk-taking, which can lead to discourteous driving, which can lead to disputes. Being more patient behind the wheel will go a long way toward keeping you out of the way of road rage.

It's impossible to cover all the dangerous situations you can find yourself in when you're driving a car. We've tried to cover many of the ones where a level-headed, quick-reacting defensive driver can do

things to avoid collisions and respond safely. By the way, a lot of dangerous situations can be avoided by simply being more alert.

Here's a tip. Any time you see or hear a motorcyclist near you, be especially cautious. Motorcyclists are difficult to see because they're smaller than most vehicles. Statistics show that motorcyclists are about 16 times as likely as automobile occupants to die in a traffic crash.

We hope all the information here is useful to you. And if it is, please pass it along to other drivers who can use it.

This has been written in cooperation with the National Safety Council. It contains general recommendations that we believe will be helpful in many emergencies. Since every emergency is different, the individual driver must decide what to do in any particular case.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author Mike Carpenter, Shell State Wholesale Manager, State of Mississippi, knows the highway. In his job, Mike logs over 40,000 miles per year behind the wheel. On freeways, city streets and country roads. Mike even spends his vacations driving. He's piloted vans and recreational vehicles through the rolling hills of New England and the vineyard-dotted landscapes of Northern California. Mike has encountered many of the driving dangers highlighted inside, and he hasn't been involved in any automobile accidents for the past 15 years. But Mike is used to longevity; he's been working for Shell for 38 years. If you'd like more copies of Mike's Driving Dangers, just write to Mike Carpenter, Shell Oil Company, P. O. Box 4681, Houston, Texas 77201.



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