

#4 IN A SERIES

# ALONE BEHIND THE WHEEL

*What to do and what not to do  
when driving by yourself.*



**Count on Shell<sup>SM</sup>**

**Two violent crimes are committed in the U.S. every minute of every day. Drivers traveling alone can be particularly vulnerable. There are a number of things you can do, however, to keep yourself safer. Both inside your car and out. Read about those things here. Then pass the information along to anyone who might be alone behind the wheel.**

**Q.** What should I know about parking safety?

**A.** Lots. Where and how you choose to park can go a long way toward keeping you safer. When possible, back into a parking space. Should you need to, you'll be able to drive out with less chance of someone trapping you. Try to park close to the building entrance; this will reduce the time you're alone outside



*In most parking lots, you either have to back in or back out. If you back in, then you can drive out directly, reducing your chances of being trapped.*

your car. If you know you're going to be working late, move your car to a well-lighted area, closer to the exit. Such a precaution may reduce your risk at night. If you're in a parking lot, always choose a spot that will be well-lighted and away from shrubs and bushes so you can see under and around your car as you approach it.

**Q. Should I do anything special in parking garages?**

**A.** Yes. Again, park in a well-lighted spot, ground level if available, close to the parking attendant station. If you can't do that, try to park close to the elevators or stairwell near the building entrance. Spend as little time as possible going to and from your car. Try to stay where you can be seen by others because there's safety in numbers. If you have any concerns at all, call the building's security service and have someone accompany you to your car.

**Q. If I lock my car before I leave it, is that enough?**

**A.** No. You should take additional precautions. If you have a two-door car, flip your passenger seat forward when you're leaving your vehicle. If it's a four-door car, move the driver seat forward.

Upon your return, if you see that it has been returned to its original position, go back to the building you came from immediately and notify security or the

police. Someone could be hiding on the back floorboard. As you approach your car, don't just look around it; look under it as well. Criminals sometimes hide there.



*Parking garages can be dangerous, especially at night. If you have a choice between the elevator or stairs, take the elevator. It's quicker and you're less likely to come in contact with someone loitering there. Have a security guard accompany you to your car if possible. Always look inside and around your car before getting in. Then lock the doors and drive away quickly.*

*If you are with friends, have everyone get in the same car, then take them to their individual vehicles. Make sure each engine has started before driving away.*

**Q. I hear a lot about carjackings. Is there any way to avoid them?**

**A.** The FBI estimates that approximately 25,000 carjackings occur in the U.S. each year. There are defensive techniques you can use that might keep you from becoming a carjacking victim.

1. Always keep your doors locked. And scan ahead and behind as you drive. Look for individuals who may be loitering near an intersection.
2. If it looks as if you may be driving into a potentially dangerous situation at an upcoming intersection, slow down and, if you can

do so safely, time the light to avoid stopping. Be sure there is no cross traffic that could cause a collision.

3. Try to keep escape routes open. Stop far enough behind the car in front of you so that you can see its back tires touching the pavement. That way, if you have to pull out quickly, you won't have to back up first. Also, stay in the left-hand lane when approaching an intersection. You'll be farther from anyone approaching you

carjackers forcibly take control of the car and the driver. If you believe that you've been intentionally bumped, don't stop and get out of the car. Drive to a safe, public place close by to check the damage. You'll be a lot less vulnerable.

**Q.** Got any safety "trip tips"?

**A.** Do plan your trip before you leave.



*When stopping, leave enough distance between you and the car in front of you to see the car's back tires touching the pavement. Then you'll be able to pull out quickly if necessary.*

from the curb, and there will be less chance of your being "boxed in" by a car on your left and a car parked at the curb.

**Q.** What's that "bump-and-run" carjacking thing?

**A.** It's a technique carjackers often employ. People in one car pull up behind an unsuspecting driver and bump that driver's car. When the driver gets out to inspect the damage, the

Mark your route (how you're going and where you plan to stop) on a map. Give a copy of that plan (with appropriate phone numbers where you can be reached and an estimated time of arrival) to a family member, friend or business associate.

*Don't* take maps or other obvious travel aids into rest stops or restaurants. You don't want to call attention to the fact that you have

a long way to travel.

*Do* check your car out completely before you get on the road. Many breakdowns are avoidable, especially those involving fuel, oil, cooling or electrical problems.

*Don't* think just because you have a cellular phone that you won't need to use a public one.

Carry change just in case.

*Do* use valet parking at hotels and restaurants. It's safer than spending too much time in the parking lots.

*Don't* try to fix a flat if you think you are in an unsafe area. Drive slowly to a service station or police station.

**Q.** Should I always have my doors locked when I'm driving?

**A.** Yes. All your doors. And you should always have your windows rolled up. If it's hot and you don't have air conditioning, roll your windows down just enough to allow air to flow in, but not enough to allow someone to get his hand in the car.

**Q.** What do I do if my car just conks out?

**A.** If your car comes to a stop slowly, try to pull safely off the road, out of the way of traffic. Stay in your car. If you have a

### **Potential crime prevention in the palm of your hand.**

Have your keys ready as you approach your vehicle. Fumbling to find them and unlocking your car takes time and makes you more vulnerable.



*A small flashlight in your keychain lets you see your door locks and ignition easier at night. Quicker starts. Quicker getaways.*



*Pepper spray or mace can be attached to your keychain so you don't have to fumble for it if you ever need it. But be aware that depending on wind direction, spray could blow back in your face. It also could be taken and used against you.*



*Sometimes you have to give your keys to others, such as when you valet park. Keychains that let you easily separate your car keys from your home keys keep individuals from gaining access to your home.*

mobile phone, call for help and give them your location. If you don't have a roadside assistance service, call the police. If you don't have a phone, stick a white handkerchief or scarf part way out your window. This will alert passersby that you need assistance. If someone does stop to help you, stay inside your car with all the doors locked and the windows rolled up high enough so no one can get a hand inside the car. Tell them what kind of help you need. If their concern is genuine, they'll make a call for you or alert someone who can help you at their next stop. Don't get out and raise the hood of your car. This blocks your view of oncoming traffic (one of whom may be a policeman) and it signals the potential criminal that your car is immobile. You

should always carry a "Call Police" window sign in your glove compartment. That way many drivers will see that you need help, and if someone does stop that you are suspicious of, you can tell him that someone saw your sign and has already contacted the police, who are currently en route.

**Q. Is having a phone in the car a good idea?**

**A.** Yes. But it can be dangerous if not used properly. People with a phone in their car run a 34% higher risk of having a collision. If you must dial, wait until you are stopped at a traffic light, or better still, pull safely off the road, stop, then dial. If you preprogram your phone to activate 9-1-1, or other emergency numbers, with just the push of one



*If you think you're being followed, don't go home. You'll just be bringing a potential attacker to your home and loved ones. Drive to a well-lighted public place like a hospital, store, service station or police station. Then draw attention to yourself. Lean on your horn if you have to.*

button you'll be able to react much more quickly in an emergency. Speaker-phone units that allow you to talk and listen without holding a receiver are better, but they can still be dangerous if they pull your attention away from the road. It's best to use the phone in the car only as an emergency aid, or to let people at your destination know in advance if you are going to be late. That's better than trying to drive too fast to get there on time.



*Alertness levels drop sharply about the time one usually goes to bed. Three hours of driving after one's normal bedtime produces an almost uncontrollable drowsiness in nine out of ten drivers.*

**Q. I seem to get more tired when I drive alone. What can I do about it?**

**A.** Driver fatigue can be a killer. It's especially dangerous when you are alone. Here are some things you can do to help stay awake:

1. Don't start a trip late in the day. Get plenty of sleep before you drive.
2. Avoid long drives at night. The glare of lights outside and from your dashboard increases the chance of highway hypnosis.
3. Adjust your car's environment to help you stay awake. Keep the temperature

cool. Turn the radio up and switch stations frequently. Don't use cruise control. Keep your body involved in the drive.

4. Use good posture. Keep your head up, shoulders back, buttocks tucked against the seat back, legs *not* fully extended. Keep them at a 45 degree angle.

5. Take frequent breaks. Stop at well-lit rest areas or service stations, and get out of the car to stretch or have a snack.

6. Avoid alcohol entirely.

7. Don't allow your eyes to become fatigued. Wear sunglasses to fight glare during the day, but never wear them at night.

8. Break the monotony. Vary your speed levels. Chew gum. Talk to yourself.

If you absolutely cannot keep your eyes open, the best remedy is to stop and get some sleep. Staying at a motel for the night is usually the safest bet. If you cannot find a motel, it is still better to be off the road than to fall asleep while driving. If you do pull off the road for a quick nap, be sure you are safely off the road, preferably at a well-lit, secure rest area, service plaza or truck stop, with all doors locked. If a security guard is present, ask him or her to keep an eye on your car while you're napping.

**Q.** What if I plan and prepare but someone confronts me anyway?

**A.** Your foremost concern should be your personal safety. If you are confronted by a robber or a carjacker, don't resist. Give up your purse, your wallet, your keys quickly. Do not attempt to reason with a robber.

Give him what he wants. Try to remember what the individual looks like. Remember, possessions can be replaced. Your life can't be.

*Don't take chances to save possessions. The only thing that's irreplaceable is your life.*



*This has been written in cooperation with the National Crime Prevention Council  
([www.weprevent.org](http://www.weprevent.org))*

*and the National Safety Council ([www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org)).*

*It contains general recommendations that we believe to be helpful; however, every emergency is different. The individual driver must decide what to do in any particular case.*



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