5 Safe Driving Tips for CMV Drivers

We’ve all heard the old saying: it’s better to be safe, than sorry. This is especially true in the trucking and transportation industry. As a driver, your personal commitment to safely operating your Commercial Motor Vehicle (CMV) has a huge impact on others including your fleet and other road users. Below are five tips to help you operate safely when driving.

1. Buckle Up

Seat belts aren’t just for passenger/4-wheel vehicles. Wearing a seat belt is a law for commercial motor vehicle drivers too (under 49 CFR § 392.16). Despite this, almost 20% of CMV drivers still aren’t using one!

What about passengers? It was announced in June 2016 that passengers in large commercial vehicles will also be required by law to wear seat belts. There are many excuses for why people don’t want to wear them: seat belts aren’t comfortable, seat belts take time to fasten, I’m not going to get into an accident, etc. If you watch this video released by the Department of Transportation (DOT), you’ll think twice about making excuses about wearing one!

2. Know Your Surroundings

As drivers of largest vehicles on the road, it’s important that you’re always aware of your surroundings - especially when looking to make a potentially difficult maneuver such as turning into high traffic areas or making a lane change on a congested highway. The most recent Large Truck Crash Causation Study (LTCCS) reported that 14% of large-truck crashes were caused by a CMV drivers inadequate surveillance.

Where Should You Be Looking?

Look At Least 15 Seconds Ahead

When driving, it’s important that you’re always looking at least 15 seconds ahead of where you are. This will give you additional time to respond if the conditions ahead of you change. This 15 seconds will give you time to make an evasive maneuver if you need to avoid something or brake gradually.

Always Check Your Mirrors

Watch for vehicles in your blind spots. Not everyone realizes how big your vehicle is or will be courteous enough to give you the space that you need. Be proactive and manage your own space. It is recommended that you check your mirrors every 5-10 seconds.
Scan Intersections

Intersections can be a dangerous place. When approaching, it’s important to ensure your constantly scanning for changes. Remember that your reaction time in a truck isn’t as fast as it is in a small vehicle. Slowly approach the intersection, check your mirrors, and watch your blind spot for a smooth entry.

3. Drive for the Conditions

Always adjust your driving style to align with the road conditions. Excessive speed for road conditions is one of the major causes of CMV crashes. Not only does speed increase your likelihood of getting into an accident, it also increases the severity of the accident.

Driving for the conditions isn’t just for the winter (snowy of icy conditions). It also applies during the summer months. In the summer the roads are much more congested which leads to more accidents - slowdowns are unavoidable. Additionally, construction season is in full swing. Watch your speed and remember conditions can change quickly.

4. Avoid Distractions

When driving your CMV, avoid distractions and focus your attention of safely operating your vehicle.

In 2013, The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reported that over 3,000 people were killed in distraction-related accidents with an additional 424,000 injured. Additionally, a study completed by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute reported that truck drivers who text and drive are 23 time more likely to be in a crash or near-crash.

5. Don’t Drive When Fatigued

This is easier said than done as fatigued driving continues to be an ongoing battle in the trucking industry. The pressure drivers face to drive fatigued continues - from drivers wanting to maximize their time on the road to dispatchers pushing drivers to keep going when they know they shouldn’t. As a driver, you can help prevent fatigued driving by:

Taking Breaks and Getting the Rest You Need

If you’re feeling tired and unfocused, pull over and take a break. Get out of your truck and go for a walk or take a quick nap. Make sure that you’re getting enough sleep the night before you hit the road.

Avoid Medications That Make You Drowsy

Prescription and non-prescription medication can make you drowsy, sleepy, and reduce your reaction time. If it says to avoid operating heavy machinery on the bottle, that means your truck too! You’ll also want to avoid using caffeine to boost your alertness. Caffeine may only wake you up for a short period of time before the effects wear off and you’re back in the same position. Additionally, excessive caffeine consumption can lead to other negative side effects such as nervousness and irritability.

Eat Well

A healthy, well-balanced diet can also help you reduce fatigue on the road. Avoid skipping meals when you’re in a rush and make sure you eat something before going to bed. Avoid really heavy meals and opt for something on the healthier side. A healthy diet can help you get a better sleep, leaving you well-rested and ready to hit the road in the morning.

ELD Exemptions

As the deadline for the Electronic Logging Device (ELD) mandate approaches, there is still a considerable amount of confusion surrounding who
exactly will be exempt from installing the devices into their Commercial Motor Vehicles (CMVs). We’ve covered many of these exemptions in the past, but there’s still a big one that deserves some attention: the 100/150 air mile exemptions. If you meet the criteria for either of these exemptions, you aren’t required to follow federal hours of service regulations – and therefore won’t be required to have an ELD.

Demystifying the 100/150 Air Mile Exemptions

If you are a short-haul, interstate carrier that operates within either 100 or 150 air miles of your work location, you may be exempt from the ELD mandate. To qualify, you must meet all of the following criteria.

If you are a CDL driver, you must:
♦ Operate solely within a 100 air-mile radius*.
♦ Be completely off-duty within 12 hours.
♦ Report back to the same work location every day.
♦ Have at least 10 consecutive hours off-duty between each shift.

If you are a non-CDL driver, you must:
♦ Operate solely within a 150 air-mile radius*.
♦ Not drive through any state that requires a CDL for the type of vehicle being operated.
♦ Report back to the same work location every day.
♦ Not drive after the 14th hour of coming on duty in a period of 7 consecutive days.
♦ Not drive after the 16th hour of coming on duty in a period of 2 consecutive days.

Drivers are currently required to fill out a paper log if any one of the criteria listed above is not met. For example: a CDL driver gets a job that will bring in a lot of cash, but he has to travel 300 air miles to deliver the load. He is required to maintain a paper log for the duration of the trip.

*An air-mile can be calculated by starting from the principle place of business (the city and state where the company is based) and calculating in a straight line the distance to the farthest point that will be traveled to.

Other ELD Exemptions

If the 100/150 air mile exemptions don’t apply to you, there are currently three other major ELD exemptions, as determined by the FMCSA. They include:

1. **Drivers who keep logs for no more than eight days during a 30-day period.** Many drivers infrequently travel over the 100/150 air mile radius. Take the example given above of the CDL driver who goes over 100 air miles one time. Even though he has to keep a paper log for that trip, he does not have to purchase an ELD provided that the situation rarely occurs... specifically, no more than eight days in any 30-day period.

2. **Driveaway-towaway operators transporting empty vehicles intended for sale or repair.** This includes tow-truck drivers who do not own the vehicles they tow and trucks that are being driven solely for delivery – meaning the vehicle being driven is the commodity.

3. **Drivers of vehicles with a model year of 1999 or earlier.** These vehicles are exempt simply because some do not have the ports required to connect an ELD. There has been some confusion about model vs. manufacture year, but the FMCSA has been clear: it’s the model year of the vehicle they’ll use to determine compliance...not the year it was manufactured or the year of the vehicle’s engine.