

# MSU-ES Dawg Tracks



January, 2010

Defensive Driving - Rules to Live By - "I"



MISSISSIPPI STATE  
UNIVERSITY



Our Extension Division logs more miles than any other department in the IHL structure. This is the personality of Extension and is necessary to carry out our mission. In defense of this mission, it behooves us to be cognizant of all facets of safe driving.

I want to use a couple of months and break down some rules of good driving techniques and defensive driving that, if heeded, will help us stay focused on staying safe and returning to our various destinations unharmed.

## **RULES TO LIVE BY:**

- **Pay Attention** - "I never saw him" is the most common excuse heard after a collision. Distractions such as daydreaming, fatigue, sleepiness, fatigue, and talking (usually on a cell phone) all can result in a collision or accident. The basic elements of defensive driving that we need to remember and use are: **SEE – RECOGNIZE – AVOID**. Remaining alert enables us to recognize hazards and avoid collisions.
- **Don't Trust Anybody** - You can never rely on what the other person is going to do. Relying on the other driver for your safety is too unpredictable. We should approach the other driver's ability with a very cautious attitude, one that is predicated on unpredictability. If we accept that other drivers are unpredictable, our next step should be to be wary and watch them closely.
- **Yield Anyway** - "Nobody ever yielded their way into a collision." When you have doubts about the right of way - give it away. The other person may be in the wrong but it's better to give it to them than to get hurt or maybe even killed. Sometimes right of way rules are misunderstood and the rules unclear. Again, if there is uncertainty about the rules, give the guy the road.  
**Driving Safely – it's not the principle, but the outcome that counts.**
- **Don't Speed** – Driving at higher speeds increases your risks in two ways:
  - ~Cuts down on your reaction time.
  - ~Results in more "stored" energy that will dissipate in any collision.When you consider the risks, are they worth the gain? The faster you drive the less time you have to react and the more "stored" energy you have at impact.  
A **defensive driver** will choose his/her speed level that is closely equal to the traffic flow. But, if the traffic is moving faster than they desire, they will move to the right lane and let the vehicles pass. This is usually a requirement.

Don't neglect to maintain the correct following distance. One thing to remember, and this is brought home in the National Safety Council's "Safe Driving" course, on interstate driving, speeding doesn't save much time. The difference between 65 mph and 80 mph on a 50 mile stretch saves you 8.7 minutes. Is risking one's life worth this little savings in time? I don't think so!

- **Don't Drive Impaired** – Related to driving, impairment means that there is a factor present that decreases one's ability to operate a vehicle safely. The first thing we all think about is alcohol and/or drugs. In the USA, the presumptive level or "legal level" is .08. However, tests have proven that impairment often starts at .04, which begins to affect your judgment, vision and ability to react quickly and responsibly.  
**Personal responsibility** is the foremost factor in **impaired** driving. Do we consider all the aspects of our health before we start out on a long trip, a short trip or to work or shopping, etc.? Hopefully, we do, but obviously everyone doesn't.  
**RoadtripAmerica** states that if everyone would pay attention, not speed, always "buckle up," and not drive impaired, no one would ever be killed in an accident.
- **Wear Your Seatbelt – BUCKLE UP!!** – I believe, and all safety related companies state, that the seat belt was the most significant device ever invented. Seatbelts do several things for us, such as: Provides impact protection, absorbs crash forces and keeps you from being thrown out of a vehicle. Modern vehicles are constructed with "crumple zones" and seatbelts are an integral part of this system. The belts hold you in place while the vehicle collapses around your "safe zone." Belts help to keep you in place, in control and better able to avoid the crash. With all these benefits, folks still find reasons to avoid wearing them:
  - ~They wrinkle my clothes – no doubt, they do!
  - ~They are uncomfortable – maybe a little, so use the adjustment device to help you.
  - ~"I want to be thrown clear of the vehicle" – Big deal! Fall on your head, which is the No.1 cause of death in vehicle crashes.
  - ~"I don't want to be trapped if there is a collision or if the vehicle is on fire or ends up in the water." The belts increase your likelihood of remaining conscious after impact, less injured and able to get out.There are other reasons for not using them, but more justifications for using them with statistics to prove it. One is that seatbelts would prevent roughly 50% of all deaths and injuries.

**~AVOID THE WORST~  
SAFETY FIRST!**