



SAFETY ADVISOR



Following too Closely

Following too closely or "tailgating" is a common cause of collisions, and is against the law in most states.

It is important to have enough space around your vehicle to allow you time to think, react and take action if a hazard arises. This is particularly true for semi trucks and other large vehicles, which take up more space on the road and require greater distance for stopping and maneuvering. The average stopping distance for a loaded tractor trailer traveling at 55 mph in ideal conditions is 196 feet, compared to 133 feet for a passenger vehicle.

Maintain a Safe Following Distance

A safe following distance allows enough time to stop if the vehicle ahead of you stops suddenly. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) suggests at least one second following distance for each 10 feet of vehicle length at speeds below 40 mph. At greater speeds, you must add one additional second. For example, if you are driving a 40-foot vehicle at 35 mph, you should be able to count four seconds between the time the vehicle ahead of you passes a fixed object and when you pass it. In a 60-foot rig, there should be a six-second space. At speeds over 40 mph, you would need five seconds for a 40-foot vehicle and seven seconds for a 60-foot vehicle. If you find you're following too closely, fall back and count again until you have at least the minimum safe following distance.

Braking distance is greatly affected by the condition of the road surface, rain, snow, ice and road debris. Visibility is also impacted by adverse weather conditions. Always increase following distance so that you're able to stop in these conditions.

Space to the Rear

Truckers are often the victims of tailgating. This can happen in congested or heavy traffic, during bad weather conditions or when ascending an upgrade in the road. If truckers find themselves being tailgated, they should:

- Stay in the right lane to allow faster traffic to pass, especially in heavier traffic or when traveling uphill.
- Avoid acceleration. It is better to be tailgated at a lower than higher speed.
- Avoid any quick moves, lane changes or fast stops. Be sure to signal turns early and reduce speed gradually.

- Increase the following distance in front to open up more room to react, maneuver your vehicle or brake if conditions require it. This also allows more space for the tailgater to pass.

Tailgating is an aggressive driving behavior and is often associated with incidents of road rage. Avoid flashing your brake lights or otherwise reacting in ways to aggravate the tailgater.

The content of this material has been taken in large part from information published by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. For more information, go to www.fmcsa.dot.gov.

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