

SafeDriver Monthly Newsletter

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Driving Around Construction Zones

While asphalt roads are a commonplace sight today, it has taken years to build up the network of roads and pathways that crisscross over entire countries. As humans are constantly evolving and expanding into new territory, those same roads also require continuous upkeep to ensure that they remain safe to traverse. Construction in and around roads maintains a constant, steady presence in the day-to-day driving of countless commuters. Knowing what to watch for and how to work with the construction happening along a planned route is vital to drivers in maintaining their safety and time as they traverse these areas.



Construction occurs on and off of commonly traveled roads. To protect themselves, construction teams use combinations of merging traffic, single lanes, signs, and detours to protect the area in which they need to work. As drivers, it's vital to pay attention to these signs and recognize when and how a typical travel route has been altered to prevent an accident.

A common tactic to avoid shutting down a road completely is restricting it to one lane so work can be done where needed. When approaching a construction zone that has done this, workers will place signs of varying distances up the road from where the new stop would occur so drivers have a better chance of seeing one of the signs and stopping before plowing into the workers. Typically, two construction workers will be holding poles at either end of the change with a stop sign on one side and the word slow on the opposite side. Communicating to each other through walkies-talkies to ensure they don't send cars on a collision course, drivers attempting to go in both directions will take turns using the single lane until they have passed the construction zone going off of the instructions of the worker.

Having 2 or more lanes merge into one also allows for work to occur without halting the flow of traffic too heavily. In this scenario, there are still multiple signs set up before actually reaching traffic cones in the road that guide the drivers in one lane into merging with another. The final warning sign will look like a straight line with an arrow on one end that has another line curling into it from the side. When merging with traffic, drivers are generally expected to allow for traffic to come together like the teeth on a zipper. One car after another taking turns getting into the lane that remains open.

Ultimately, if there is a large repair taking place or some other construction occurring, drivers may be faced with a detour sign suggesting an alternate route before they hit where the detour is outlined.

The best way to protect yourself and workers present while driving through a construction area is to lower your speed and watch for posted signs that should explain how the route has altered.



Evading Emergency Vehicles

The few seconds between when an emergency vehicle arrives at a scene can mean a difference in the continued life of the people they are there to help. As citizens and humans, people should support the efforts of others in preserving life in whatever small ways they can, which includes knowing what to do when seeing an emergency vehicle approaching while on the road.

As a general rule of thumb, anytime someone sees flashing lights in their rearview mirror they should pull over on the side of the road or as far as they can to try and clear a path for the vehicle to pass. Emergency vehicles that are enroute to or from an emergency are allowed to drive in ways that other vehicles are not. Emergency personnel are able to go through red lights, which is something they do slowly while ensuring all the drivers coming through have stopped in awareness of first, go above the speed limit at set increases, and drive on the side of the road where necessary and able in order to respond to emergencies in time to help.

All drivers on the road need to be aware of two sets of laws that protect themselves, emergency personnel, and others in traffic around them. There are differing laws to be applied when cars need to move over for an emergency vehicle and when they are being passed by one.

“Pull over” laws indicate that drivers are expected and legally required to move out of the way of an oncoming emergency vehicle as much as they are safely able. If you are on a divided highway, meaning there is a physical barrier separating the flows of traffic from one another, then you don’t need to move if the emergency vehicle is going in the opposite direction. If the emergency vehicle is approaching from behind on any roadway, move over to the side of the road and decrease your speed or stop traffic permitting. Do not do any maneuvers that cause you to break the law yourself or pose danger to yourself or others in traffic.



“Move over” laws have very similar requirements as pull over laws with the addition of what to do for stopped emergency vehicles. If any emergency vehicle is stopped or pulled to the side in the roadway with their lights going, you must either go into the left lane on multi lane roads or slow to 20 miles below the current speed limit or further to prevent an accidental collision with the vehicle or emergency personnel.

Although laws for approaching and moving around emergency vehicles vary by state, it is universally acknowledged that no driver should ever race or pull out in front of an emergency vehicle with its lights or sirens being used. This action could result in significant fines or jail time, especially if the poor driving resulted in injury or delay of care due to negligent driving. Remembering to maintain a decent distance from emergency vehicles in use at all times should help prevent an additional emergency from arising.

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Preventative Preparedness

Inevitably, cars will slow and break down over time. A well-maintained car may last for decades while a poorly used or treated car may only last a few years. When it comes to ensuring a longer lasting life, and safer ride, for vehicles, some simple preventative measures will help negate undesirable driving and vehicular results.

Cars, like humans, are very delicately balanced internally. Without proper fluid and checkups their pipes will experience gunk forming and could lead to engine failure. As this failure could occur anywhere, it is vital that cars be maintained to avoid potential accidents of unsafe driving conditions.

Radiator fluid is responsible for maintaining a steady temperature within a car's engine. A lack of radiator fluid would cause the temperature within an engine to rise dramatically over a short period of time and could even cause a potential explosion that would risk the lives of both the people within the car and in surrounding vehicles that could be affected by the sudden movement.

This is something that can only be checked after a car has been left for hours after having last been driven. It is recommended that this be checked by a professional rather than at home. If this fluid is checked after the car has been recently used, the resulting steam and pressure could cause significant harm to the person under the hood.

The oil within a car should be changed, on average, once every 10,000 miles. Oil lubricates the different moving components of a car's engine. A lack of oil would cause increased friction and could result in fire under the hood. Driving with low oil levels could significantly reduce the lifespan of someone's vehicle. This, like radiator fluid, is something that can only be changed when a car has been left to sit and cool off for several hours after being last driven to avoid harming the person attempting the oil change. If this is being done in a garage by a professional they are able to mitigate these dangers themselves.

Windshield wiper fluid, while not seemingly as important as radiator fluid or oil, can also significantly impact the safety of driving a vehicle. A lack of fluid can create unsafe driving conditions if something were to splatter over the windshield and there was no fluid with which to wash it off. If a driver cannot see clearly, then they cannot drive safely. A lack of sight, for multiple reasons, could significantly reduce the lifespan of a car.

Simply checking these three fluid levels can help mitigate potential disasters on the road. As each of these actions would only take a few moments to check and assess, it is much more cost efficient to maintain a regular monthly routine of checking these fluid levels than it would be to replace a vehicle or risk an accident.

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