



Keeping you on the road...^o

Tips for safe driving

Go further



Safe driving doesn't happen automatically. The consequences of not driving safely range from the inconvenient to the catastrophic.

Over 7,500 van and truck drivers and passengers are injured in road accidents each year - and over 100 of these are killed.

As a professional driver you have a special responsibility - not just to yourself but also to other road users. You can meet that responsibility and set a good example by driving safely.

Whether you're employed or working for yourself, all operators are responsible to ensure that the vehicles are safe and properly maintained. A well maintained vehicle is not in itself enough to ensure safety. It's up to you as a driver to:

- Check your vehicle daily
- Know your route
- Be aware of weather forecasts
- Drive safely

This advice is aimed the professional driver to simply help you:

- Reduce potential injuries to yourself
- Reduce potential injuries to other
- Reduce the number accidents you are involved in
- Reduce the congestion that results from accidents
- Save you and your employer money

The Professional Driver

Driving a truck for a living is NOT the same as owning and driving your own car. Professional drivers are in a position of great responsibility. You require great skill to carry out your job and you are subject to stringent checks.

'Fit' for purpose

You are required to pass a number of medical tests, including an eye test - whether or not you wear glasses or contact lenses. Your initial test will have taken place when you applied for your first professional licence. Medicals are required every 5 years after the age of 45 and annually from the age of 65. It's your responsibility to inform the DVLA if you suffer a medical condition or disability that may affect your driving.

Drivers' Hours

The time you spend at the wheel is restricted for reasons of road safety, working conditions and fair competition. There are maximum limits on driving time and minimum requirements for breaks and rest periods. Various exemptions exist, some of which apply on UK journeys only.

If you operate under the European Union (EU) drivers' hours and tachograph rules, you will also be subject to the working time provisions of the Road Transport (Working Time) Regulations. If you do not fall under EU drivers' hours and tachograph rules, you will normally fall within the scope of separate UK legislation on these areas but will still be subject to certain aspects of the working time regulations.

Tiredness

Professional driving can be hard work. If you start to feel sleepy while driving, find a safe place to stop (not the hard shoulder of a motorway) as soon as possible and get some sleep. Modern commercial vehicles are often comfortable but don't be tempted to relax too much! To combat the risk of falling asleep at the wheel, you should:

- Take adequate rest breaks – plan them into your day
- Get adequate sleep before starting out
- Not start a journey if already tired
- Avoid driving if you're not 100% fit
- Never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Avoid heavy meals before driving
- Stay alert – you will feel more sleepy between 2pm – 4pm and in the early hours of the morning
- Get plenty of fresh air into the cab – though cold air, in itself, will not prevent you falling asleep

If you feel tired at any stage of your journey, as a 'quick fix' – stop, have a strong coffee and a 15 minute nap. Though the only real cure for tiredness is to get sufficient sleep.

Drugs

Driving while influenced by drugs – whether prescribed medication or illegal substances – is against the law and is just as dangerous as driving when drunk. Your employer may conduct random drug testing and registering positive for drugs in such tests can result in instant dismissal.

Some drugs reduce concentration, encourage risk-taking or distort perception. Many cause excessive sleepiness the following day. This can apply to prescription or off-the-shelf medicines, as well as illegal substances. Everyday cold or flu medicine can have side effects. Always read the labels of medicines carefully.

Get to know your vehicle

Know how your vehicle works and spot any problems before you set off. Defects or problems should always be recorded and reported as the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) undertakes regular checks on vehicle maintenance and defect reporting arrangements. They also have the right to stop vehicles on the road, carry out spot checks and issue prohibition notices if necessary.

Safety checks

Important checks should be carried out before starting a journey. You don't have to be a mechanic to do these - they are easy and help prevent serious accidents

You should do a walk-round check of your vehicle before each journey because as a driver you are legally responsible for:

- Checking the vehicle is roadworthy
- Ensuring that any equipment, fittings and fixtures required are present and serviceable
- Not driving the vehicle if faults are present

You should also conduct an in-cab safety check. This helps ensure your own safety as well as that of passengers and other road users. Never begin a journey with a defective warning device or when a warning is showing. If a warning light shows while you are driving, stop immediately and seek professional help.

Cruise control

If you have cruise control available, use it correctly. Do not use it to brake or accelerate, as you are not in control of the vehicle when you do so. Cruise control improves fuel efficiency by delivering the right amount of fuel for the given situation.

Gears

Choose the right gear for your driving situation at all times. Lower gears may only be necessary if the vehicle is loaded or climbing a steep gradient. Plan ahead before junctions, when approaching a hazard or when manoeuvring to avoid dangerous situations.

Plan ahead

Before starting a journey, plan your route, including rest breaks, and identify any potential hazards. This minimises the risk of suddenly encountering dangerous situations.

Route planning

Planning your journey helps you choose the safest and most efficient route. Always plan an alternative route to allow for accidents or bad weather. Try to avoid congestion at peak times. The length, width, weight and height of your vehicle will sometimes dictate the route you take.

Forward planning

Use the advantage of your elevated position in the cab to look as far ahead on the road as possible. Plan ahead for manoeuvres, understand the road and consider other road users at all times.