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## ow to Get Where You Are Going Safely

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Why do vehicle drivers consider themselves good drivers and feel they are not at risk? Most likely they have the attitude that if they're involved in an accident, it will probably be the other driver's fault. Of course, that is not always the case. Most drivers are great rationalizers and look for others or something else to blame.

Comments like, "I was forced off the road," or "If it hadn't been raining I could have stopped," or "I wasn't going over the speed limit," are just a few of the alibis used. Instead of those comments, would you hear a driver say, "I over-steered and went off the road," or "It was raining and I should have slowed down," or "I was under the speed limit but road conditions were poor"? Our entire society has become one of rationalizers, and no one wants to take responsibility for his/her actions.

### Good Driving Habits

When was the last time you reviewed your driving skills? Was it recently or when you first acquired your operator's license years ago? With the many changes in auto manufacturing and the development of new highways over the years, many safety features on autos and highways are changing constantly. With these changes, and as we age, it is important for individuals to review their driving skills periodically.

It should be emphasized that good habits develop when a person has experience, periodically reviews safety rules and road regulations, and keeps a positive attitude at all times. Each vehicle comes with an owner's manual, containing important information about every part of the vehicle. It also has inspection charts recommending service maintenance at different mileage intervals. The majority of parts on a vehicle are mechanical and should be

inspected and serviced according to the guidelines provided. Failure to do so could cause severe damage and expensive repairs. Yearly required state inspection can point out damages, but don't depend solely on the state inspection.

### Map Reading

Start by obtaining a good road atlas of the United States. Some will include parts of Canada and Mexico. The atlas should contain all major highways, both federal and state.

A general knowledge of the main compass points—north, south, east, and west—is really all that is required since all maps are uniform. A perusal of any map will give you much pertinent information.

State highway route signs are not uniform. You may find odd-numbered and even-numbered routes running east and west or north and south. All state signs are black on white. All maps will have a legend or explanation of symbols. Some will contain mileage distance charts and other pertinent information. Maximum miles-per-hour (mph) speed limits are:

Interstate – 65 mph unless otherwise posted (West Virginia, 70 mph)

Open Highway – 55 mph

Business or Residential Area – 25 mph

School Zone (While children are present) – 15 mph

### Route Numbering and Navigation

Most highways are identified by U.S. or state route numbers. Interstate highways are identified by distinctive red, white, and blue shields and are numbered according to certain rules:

- Even-numbered interstates run east to west.
- Odd-numbered interstates run north and south.
- Three-digit numbers with an even first number identify beltways or bypasses around cities.
- Three-digit numbers with an odd first number identify spur routes.
- West Virginia route numbering is not uniform. Even and odd numbers will run north and south and east and west.

A good road atlas can be purchased for \$8-\$10 and will contain information on national parks and their facilities, recreational parks, and points of interest including historic areas and monuments. In addition, you will find counties, cities, and towns listed with population statistics. Travel information on tourism, state laws for cars towing trailers, and fishing and hunting license information also are included. Mileage charts, distances between major U.S. cities, and major cities in each state are included. The state maps will include insets of major cities within the state.

An atlas contains many safety tips too numerous to mention. An explanation of road and related symbols is always found in the front pages.

The West Virginia official highway map is similar to the state map carried in an atlas, but is much larger and easier to read. Free state maps can be obtained through the West Virginia Department of Transportation, Division of Highways. Other agencies throughout the state make free copies available to individuals or groups.

## **Traffic Control Signs and Shapes**

### **The shape and color of signs have meanings.**

Route markers – These are generally black on white, as are West Virginia's. Interstate markers are red, white, and blue.

Pennant – This marks the beginning of a no-passing zone.

Round – A yellow-and-black sign gives advance warning of a railroad crossing.

Black letters on white bars in the shape of an X – Called a crossbuck, this marks the exact point of a highway railroad intersection.

Pentagon – This warns of a school zone ahead or marks a school-zone crossing.

Triangle pointing down – This requires that you yield the right-of-way to crossing traffic or to merging traffic.

Slow moving vehicle – This triangular sign with a reflective red border and fluorescent orange center identifies a slow-moving vehicle or a vehicle that has made an emergency stop.

Guide signs – These tell you where you are, what road you are on, and how to get where you want to go. The many types include service, location, route marker, and distance signs. Most signs are white on green. Motorist service signs are white on blue, and signs for parks and recreation areas are white on brown.

Regulatory signs – These tell you about speed limits and other traffic laws.

Rectangular – These show traffic regulations and guide your speed and direction.

No U-turn – This just means don't turn around in the middle of a street or in an intersection.

Dual-turn lane – This sign is posted over a highway lane that is used only for making left turns from either direction. It is also referred to as a holding lane and is never used as a passing lane. It is marked with red and black.

Wrong-way – This warns you are going the wrong way on a ramp or street. It is marked with white on red.

Speed limit – This shows the fastest speed you may drive.

Octagon – This is reserved for stop signs, which means you must stop completely. No rolling or sliding stops, please. The color of the sign is white on red.

Warning signs – These are diamond-shaped and may appear with explanation beneath them. Learn what the symbols mean.

In addition to pavement markings, there are many more signs and symbols, such as broken or solid white and yellow lines and arrows, which are used to warn, regulate, and inform drivers. They are too numerous to explain.

## **Driver Responsibilities**

The driving privilege comes with many responsibilities. Only you are responsible for your actions.

There are a number of areas that a licensed operator must be aware of in order to maintain the privilege to drive. Remember, driving is a privilege and not a right.

Accidents – If you are involved in one causing bodily injury or property damage of \$250 or more, you must file a written report with the state within five days.

Point system – This is the method that the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) uses to identify and control problem drivers. Depending on the type of moving violation, you may be involved in, points will be assigned to you upon conviction. When your record reaches six points, you will receive a letter from the DMV warning you to be a more careful driver. When you receive nine points, you will be required to complete a driver improvement questionnaire. When you accumulate 12 points, your operator's license is subject to suspension.

There are 20 major moving violations for which points are given, ranging from two to six points. All other moving violations will be given two points (Driver's License Handbook).

## **Mandatory Revocation of License**

Convictions for certain violations of the motor vehicle laws are serious and require the immediate revocation of one's driver's license. The DMV must revoke a driver's license when it receives a notice of final conviction of 10 serious violations (Driver's License Handbook).

## **Compulsory Insurance**

West Virginia law mandates that all motorists driving on public roads must carry motor vehicle liability insurance. Upon renewal of your vehicle registration, you must sign a statement, under penalty of false swearing, that you have liability insurance. In addition, a certificate of insurance or other proof of insurance, which can be obtained from your insurance company, must be carried in your vehicle at all times. Failure to carry liability insurance could result in a 30-day suspension of your license if you are convicted.

## **Unlawful Disposal of Litter**

It is a violation of West Virginia law to litter public or private roadways or public or private property.

## **Road Safety**

Another problem that has crept into highway safety in recent years is what is known as "road rage."

What causes it? Aggressive drivers – This is anger at other motorists who are speeding, tailgating, trying to pass, changing lanes, or running red lights or stop signs.

### **Suggestions to deter aggressive driving**

We need more police patrols, larger fines and penalties, educational campaigns, increased road capacity, and advice on how to deal with the frustration of daily driving.

## **Defensive Driving**

We need to practice defensive driving because we fall into a pattern of bad driving habits such as:

Laziness – This is failing to look around when pulling out, and failing to signal your intentions.

Impatience – This is weaving in and out of traffic, and failing to stop completely at red lights and stop signs.

Inattention – This is failure to pay attention to developing traffic problems, and failure to take a firm grip on the steering wheel.

Arrogance – The arrogant driver is purposely in a hurry; he/she has no respect for traffic laws or the rights of other drivers or pedestrians.

Ignorance – This means a driver does not know the meaning of signs, roadway markings, or right-of-way rules.

A defensive driver with good habits is constantly aware of dangerous driving conditions and situations and is prepared to defend against them. Defensive driving means being prepared—prepared through practicing good driving habits.

THE BEST SAFETY FEATURE ON AN AUTO IS  
A REARVIEW MIRROR WITH A POLICE OFFICER IN SIGHT!

**Materials to use when leading this study topic:**

Good road atlas, pen, pencil, marking pen, West Virginia state map, 6-inch ruler

**Reference:**

Driver's License Handbook available through DMV, West Virginia Department of Transportation.

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