

Road Hazards

Road hazards, such as debris, poorly maintained roads and animals, present challenges you will encounter while driving. With adequate preparation and the correct driving techniques, you can prepare yourself for the unexpected out on the road.

A regular maintenance routine is the first step in preparation for road hazards. This will ensure that your vehicle is prepared to react when you ask it to. Pay special attention to your brakes, suspension, steering system and tires. You will find that many of these checks are performed in your “360 Check” and monthly vehicle inspections and are meant to ensure your vehicle is operated in a safe and reliable condition.



Brake systems should stop your vehicle quickly in a straight line when properly maintained and utilized. The fluid reservoir should be full of the correct type of brake fluid (consult your car’s operator’s manual for the proper type) and pads or shoes should be changed at the proper intervals. If your car is equipped with an Anti-Lock Brake (ABS) system, be sure that it is operating properly.

The suspension and steering components in your vehicle should provide you with smooth control of your car and react smartly to driver input. Any shaking, shimmying, pulling or play in the suspension or steering should be checked and corrected immediately by a reputable mechanic. You should have your vehicle’s alignment checked and replace items such as shock absorbers and MacPherson struts at the intervals suggested by the manufacturer.

Ensure that your tires are inflated to the proper pressure. You can find tire inflation recommendations in the vehicle’s operator’s manual. Do not inflate the tires to the maximum pressure unless you intend to carry a full load in the vehicle. This will cause the tires to wear unevenly and shorten their service life. Check your tires regularly for proper tread depth and ensure that there are no abnormal cuts, abrasions or separations which would render them unsafe for operation. Have the tires rotated regularly.

Our car is ready for those road hazards. Is the driver?

You will find that the driver training you have received will enable you to not only drive defensively around other drivers but also provides you with all of the skills necessary to be prepared for any situation, including road hazards. Just remember your Smith System Five Keys®:

1. **Aim High In Steering®**: Keep your look ahead distance to 15+ seconds and watch for unexpected movements in traffic that may signal trouble ahead. Do not over run your headlights at night!
2. **Get The Big Picture®**: Understand the relevant and irrelevant information in your driving scenario... it changes constantly!
3. **Keep Your Eyes Moving®**: Scan your immediate area as well as ahead and avoid a fixed stare on any one object.
4. **Leave Yourself an Out®**: Maintaining a proper four second following distance is one of the most crucial steps to take in defensive driving. Give yourself the time to react to hazards by giving yourself the space to see it coming.
5. **Make Sure They See You®**: Always be aware of your surroundings and make sure that other drivers are aware that you are there. Avoid blind spots and give other drivers the space cushion they need to react in an emergency situation.

So what do you do if you encounter a road hazard that cannot be avoided, for example: an animal that darts out in front of your car or a retread comes off of a tractor trailer tire next to you on the highway? First and most important, *do not panic!* Do not swerve violently to miss and object as this may cause a loss of control of the vehicle and a much worse situation. Grip the steering wheel firmly and prepare to compensate for any sudden changes in vehicle handling due to damage. Take your foot off of the accelerator. If you can do so without causing an unsafe condition, brake firmly to lesson the impact. In the event of a substantial impact, your air bag may deploy so be prepared for this (Airbags begin to deflate immediately after they deploy through vents in the bag. This enables the driver to maintain control of the vehicle and to avoid becoming trapped). Move your vehicle out of the travel lanes quickly and safely. Find a safe location to pull over and inspect your vehicle for damage.

Remember to initiate the emergency calling tree and report the incident, no matter how minor it appears.

Maintaining your vehicle, utilizing your driver training and avoiding distractions all contribute to being a better prepared driver. Experienced drivers know to expect the unexpected and prepare for it. Are you prepared?