

Safety Note #175

Safe Driving - Large Vehicles



Large vehicles such as passenger vans, heavy-duty trucks, and SUVs handle very differently from smaller passenger cars. Large vehicles are typically wider, longer, heavier, and sit higher off the ground. In short, larger vehicles are not as agile as lower bodied sedans. Driver knowledge and experience is particularly important in operating large vehicles safely. Additional driving precautions may be warranted, as larger vehicles require greater reliance on side-view mirrors, more space for maneuvering, additional acceleration and braking distances, and can potentially have a higher risk of crashes and rollovers if not properly driven and maintained. Drivers are responsible for the safe and lawful operation of the vehicle they are driving, and safety considerations apply regardless of location or the distance you're planning to travel. Consider the following tips for large vehicle safety:

Trip Preparation & Planning

- Ensure that drivers are competent to operate large vehicles prior to assigning them to use the vehicle. Some larger vehicles require special endorsements or licenses to operate. Drivers must be experienced, skilled, and trained in operation of any vehicle they are assigned to drive. Less experienced drivers might practice driving in a large, empty space, such as an unused parking lot, to get used to the brakes, steering and overall handling.
- ANR Drivers should not operate vehicles with a capacity of 10 passengers or more without authorization from Risk & Safety Services.
- Consider the vehicle's size and height before attempting to enter any parking deck or overhang to ensure that there is enough room to fit.
- Limit drive time, fatigue is a common cause of vehicle accidents. A driver should not be behind the wheel for more than 8 hours in any 24-hour period. Have more than one qualified driver for trips of more than 6 hours, and have drivers rotate shifts every 2-3 hours. The National Safety Council (NSC) recommends taking a ten-minute break every 100 miles or 2 hours.
- Time of day should be considered when planning your driving. The NSC discourages driving between the hours of midnight and 6:00am due to the condition of other drivers and increased likelihood of fatigue, poor visibility, and/or drivers who are intoxicated.

Pre-Trip Inspection (see Vehicle Inspection checklist at: <http://safety.ucanr.edu/Plans, Forms and Templates/>)

- Check for objects around the vehicle. Make it a practice to walk around all sides of the vehicle and perform a visual inspection before you start your trip.
- Ensure tires are in good condition and properly inflated. Tires that are worn or improperly inflated are more likely to lose traction and contribute to loss of vehicle control. Use the owner's manual or placard on the driver's door jamb to determine the proper tire size and pressure for your vehicle (not the numbers on the tire sidewall). Pressure recommendations for front and back tires may be different.
- Inspect seat belts. All occupants are required to wear seat belts when the vehicle is in motion.

Maneuvering

- Drive at a safe speed based on driving conditions. Drivers should never exceed the posted speed limit. Slow down and drive defensively, which gives you more time to react in an emergency.
- Keep steering smooth and avoid sudden, extreme turns. A sudden turn of the steering wheel, such as an emergency lane change, can result in a loss of control, and could cause a larger vehicle to roll.
- When pulling into traffic or when braking, allow more time and distance than you would when operating a passenger car. This compensates for the slower acceleration and heavier weight.
- Before changing lanes, you should always check blind spots by first leaning forward in your seat to change your sight angle and then by turning your head. Use passengers as spotters/lookouts if available.
- Maintain adequate following distance from the vehicles ahead of you and continuously scan the road for the movement of other vehicles or road hazards.
- Avoid backing when possible, such as parking head out. Backing should be done with a spotter when possible, especially in vehicles with poor side or backward visibility.

While driver reaction can be a critical factor in preventing any accident, in larger vehicles driver input can play an even greater role, so it is important to avoid distractions that take your attention from the road.

See Safety Notes #75, 90, and 132 for additional information about safe driving practices.