



FOLLOWING – BE FARSIGHTED

One of the reasons rear-end accidents happen at intersections is that a driver following too closely behind another vehicle can not see what is ahead of that vehicle ... cannot see the stop sign ahead, or the yield sign and passing traffic, or the traffic signal. The driver who follows too closely does not know that he or she will need to be slowing or stopping -- until it is too late.

How can you search the traffic scene all around you, and keep aware of what is developing so that you can be prepared for it, if you cut off most of the most important part of the traffic scene -- what is happening ahead of you?

You might have seen those signs on trucks – “If you can’t see my mirrors, I can’t see you.” That’s a good safety message. The driver of the truck needs to know if a vehicle is behind. And if you are that vehicle that’s behind, how can you tell, on the highway, that your exit ramp is coming up if you cannot see around the vehicle in front of you -- especially when it is a larger vehicle? The events happening on your right up ahead may be invisible to you if you are too close to another vehicle. This means you will not see a vehicle pulling out of a parking space or coming out of a side road or a driveway, or a pedestrian starting to cross the street.

How can you tell that it is safe to change lanes and move to the left, especially to pass a vehicle, if you cannot see well ahead of it so that you know how much room you have? A larger vehicle can keep you from seeing what you need to see ahead of you. The larger the vehicle in front of you, the more room you need between you. Stay back.

When you cannot see well ahead, you can be surprised. Suppose you need to stop fast because you are surprised. Even if *you* are able to stop in time, the driver behind you might not be able to. You will catch that driver by surprise, and you might get rear-ended.

You need to be able to react to the traffic scene well ahead of you: Is there a traffic light ahead? What can you see of the vehicles and their taillights ahead of you, or how an intersection looks? If you are too close to the vehicle in front of you, you cannot see far ahead; all you can do is react to what the vehicle does. By reducing your sight field, you leave yourself less time to do what you need to do, and less room to do it.

One of the most common accidents is the rear-ender. Many of these are minor physical damage accidents, but often there is injury involved -- occasionally very serious injury and even death, as well as vehicle fire or crushing by a larger or higher vehicle.

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The same simple precautions that can prevent you from driving into the vehicle in front of you also can help you to avoid getting hit from behind by a vehicle following you.

1. Keep a clear space:

Keep space between your vehicle and the vehicle in front. Giving yourself enough room to avoid a panic stop can keep the driver behind you from needing to make a panic stop. Use flashers and gradual speed adjustments if necessary to signal the driver behind you.

2. Keep visibility long:

Your ability to see what is ahead of you can be drastically cut back by the size of the vehicle in front of you. In a car, even a van can be enough to totally block your view. So back off or change lanes.

3. Scan:

Scan the traffic situation to avoid being caught by surprise. As you see possibly hazardous situations developing, adjust speed, prepare to brake, change lanes, etc. Give yourself enough time and space to avoid a panic stop. You may be quick enough to avoid hitting the car in front, but the driver behind may not react as quickly or have enough time left to brake and avoid hitting you.