

DRIVE TO STAY ALIVE

Make the Choice to be Defensive

Some people call it defensive driving. Some call it decision driving. There are other names and other approaches, but they all have one thing in common: driving to stay alive.

Why It's Essential

Many people drive "offensively." That is, they act as if they have to reach their destination in record time, regardless of the risk to themselves and others. They drive with an attitude for "me versus them," which leads them to take foolish risks and behave rudely toward other motorists.

The more congested our highways become, the more this competitive spirit feeds on itself. Drivers who once were good-natured and cooperative begin to drive aggressively, believing it's necessary to hold their own.

Choose to Survive

Such "racetrack" thinking is a serious mistake. Patience, courtesy and cooperation on the highway are more than luxuries. They're essential for survival.

If you've fallen into the trap of believing that you have to compete with aggressive drivers, you may need retraining in the defensive habits that you acquired when you first started to drive. If you were never taught about defensive driving, it is time to learn.

First, make a conscious choice to stop competing with other drivers and change your driving style in a way that increases your chances of personal survival. Make a written pledge to yourself, then sign it and keep it in a place where you'll see it often. Next you can acquire, or regain, the skills you need to drive defensively.

Hazards Inside and Out

Defensive driving requires you to know the laws and obey them. Develop a pattern of watching constantly for abnormal, unusual or changing conditions which may pose a hazard to you and your vehicle.

These conditions may be inside or outside your vehicle. They may have to do with the roadway, the weather, lighting conditions or other traffic. They may also have to do with the mechanical

functioning of your own vehicle. They may even relate to your physical or mental state. The Defensive Driving Code, developed by the National Safety Council, stresses the importance of knowing who has the right-of-way at all times. But, in knowing this, you must also be willing to yield the right-of-way any time it's necessary to avoid an accident.

See, Think, Do

In daily practice, defensive driving boils down to three simple steps: "See, think and do." Scan the roadway ahead of you, watching for hazards. When a hazard presents itself, decide what response is appropriate. Then act to avoid it.

Follow these steps and you can avoid the "race track mentality." You'll be a better driver when you drive to stay alive.



Constantly be on guard for possible hazards.