



Following too closely may be defined as, “situations in which one vehicle is following another vehicle so closely that even if the following driver is attentive to the actions of the vehicle ahead he/she could not avoid a collision in the circumstance when the driver in front brakes suddenly.” As a parcel delivery driver or courier, you need to be constantly aware of your following distance and leave an adequate safety cushion between you and the vehicle in front of you.

In addition to providing enough stopping time, maintaining proper following distance allows you more time to make good, well-planned decisions and affords the opportunity to scan the sides, look far enough ahead, and view the vehicle immediately in front of yours.

THE IMPACT OF TAILGATING

When drivers tailgate, they significantly reduce their stopping distance—or the distance needed to come to a complete and safe stop.

But maintaining a safe following distance about more than stopping distance. Other critical driving elements drivers sacrifice when tailgating are perception and reaction times. Perception and reaction times are two separate intervals of time. Perception is the time we need to see and process the roadway hazard, while reaction time is the time needed for a driver’s body to physically react to their brain’s perception. When a driver tailgates, both are significantly reduced.

According to the

American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, it takes alert drivers approximately two seconds to see a roadway hazard and react to it. The more space a driver allows between their vehicle and the vehicle in front of them, the more time there is to see a hazard and react safely.

SAFE FOLLOWING DISTANCE

Drivers of passenger vehicles are often instructed to leave 2 seconds of travel distance between their vehicle in front of them. However, that same guidance does not translate directly to drivers of vehicles used by parcel delivery drivers or couriers. That is because stopping distance is directly proportional to the size and weight of the vehicle. The stopping distance is much longer for a heavy truck than it is for a passenger vehicle, such as a car. In fact, it takes about twice the distance to stop a heavy truck than it does a car.

So that begs the question, “What is the appropriate following distance for the truck that my truck?” The answer to that question depends on several factors – (1) the size of your vehicle, (2) the speed at which you are traveling, and (3) environmental conditions, such as rain, snow or limited visibility due to darkness.

As parcel delivery drivers or couriers, much of your driving time is spent traveling at speeds of 40 mph or less. According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) if you are driving below 40 mph, you should leave at least one second for every 10 feet of vehicle length. For a small delivery vehicle, that is likely 2 seconds. For a larger delivery vehicle, such as a box truck, that is likely 3 seconds or more.

If you are traveling at speeds over 40 mph, you should leave one additional second of distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you.

Similarly, you should adjust your following distance to appropriately match weather conditions, road conditions, visibility, and traffic. Braking distance can be greatly affected by road surfaces, weather conditions such as rain, ice, and snow, wet leaves, or other road conditions. As such it is generally advisable to add another second of following distance if any of these conditions exist.

THE BEST DEFENSE

Your best defense against becoming involved in a rear-end collision is to create a “safety cushion” between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of yours. This allows time for to perceive, react and ultimately avoiding an accident.