

**Instructor Notes:** Driving in large cities presents a unique set of challenges for all drivers, especially towing operators. For drivers who are not used to the busy streets and chaotic pace of city driving, the experience can be quite frustrating. Discuss the following driving tips during your next safety meeting to help make driving on city streets a little easier and a lot safer.

# Safety Meeting 2016 #1 –

## The Art of City Driving

BY PATRICK GRATZIANNA, pgratz548@comcast.net



**D**riving in a large city is a sport unto itself. Clogged expressways, bumper-to-bumper traffic, countless red lights and the constant threat of being cut off can make a city tow more than frustrating. There's a lot you can do to make urban driving easier and safer. It might be a concrete jungle out there, but with a little know-how you can feel more comfortable maneuvering even the biggest tow truck through crowded city streets.

### Establish a High Visual Horizon

Scan your forward and side fields of vision looking for potential problems such as jaywalkers, trucks backing from alleys, texting pedestrians, etc. Since you sit higher in your truck than in a typical passenger car, use that to your advantage. Establish a high visual horizon and scan 1-1/2 to 2 blocks ahead of yourself looking for traffic hazards before they develop.

### Slow Down

Speed and city driving don't mix. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 88 percent of speeding-related fatalities occurred on non-interstate roads, which include urban expressways. If that wasn't bad enough, large cities are now adding speed cameras that will capture your violation and send you a ticket in the mail.

### Keep a Safe Following Distance

Scan ahead of you but never lose focus of the vehicle directly in front of you. On average, it takes 3/4 of a second to recognize a hazard and to move your foot from the accelerator

to the brake pedal. In this short period of time, you can travel a significant distance (e.g., 33 feet at 30 mph). Maintaining focus on the vehicle ahead of you will help you react in a safe and timely manner.

### Survive the Intersection

Since 50 percent of all city crashes occur at intersections, you need to pay attention. Red-light runners are responsible for an estimated 170,000 injuries and 900 fatalities annually. Even when your light turns green, confirm all traffic has stopped before driving through an intersection.

### Be Predictable

Sudden movements cause accidents. Make sure you install auxiliary tow lights and use turn signals early and often, and ease over slowly when switching lanes. When you move in a slow, steady fashion, the vehicles around you can figure out what you are doing. Be obvious.

### The Right Lane Is Safer

If you are unfamiliar with the area, stay in the right lane of traffic. It's generally the lane with slower traffic, and it will be easier to turn off the road from the right than from the left lane.

### Watch for Crosswalks

Crosswalk congestion is very common in large cities. Pedestrians always have the right of way on a crosswalk even though some may attempt to cross the street even when the "Don't Walk" signal has been activated. Always look both ways for pedestrians especially when turning at an intersection.

### Avoid Common Urban Hazards

Two driving hazards common to city streets are cyclists and taxis. Although cyclists are supposed to obey the same traffic laws as drivers, many do not. Keep an eye out for cyclists and anticipate that they will run stop signs and traffic signals. Taxis create similar concerns because they will make sudden swerves and stops in an effort to pick up a fare. Keep a safe distance from taxis and watch out for passengers entering and exiting taxis parked on the side of the road.

### Anticipate Parked Cars

Many urban roadways allow parallel parking on both sides of the road. As a professional driver, expect the unexpected and anticipate open doors and people exiting their parked vehicles without warning.

### Watch Your Height

Low bridges and viaducts create a big problem for large trucks and car carriers with high loads. Know your truck's height and plan your route accordingly. Remember: A truck being towed is generally taller than its original street height.

This list of urban driving safety tips is not all-inclusive. Discuss other problems or hazards you may encounter in the cities near you and learn from each other's experiences.

*If you need any ideas on how to prepare and present this information to your drivers, please call me at 847-894-0042 or email me at pgratz548@comcast.net.*