



Can You See the Problem?

Instructor Notes: *Of all your senses, vision is the most important when driving, but we sometimes unintentionally hinder our ability to effectively see everything around us — including safety hazards. Use this opportunity to discuss the importance of keeping your eyes on the road to avoid problems in the future.*

Every driver is required to pass a general vision test before obtaining a state driver's license and another more thorough vision test if they want to drive larger trucks. In fact, DOT requires CDL holders to pass a medical evaluation referenced in the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations; Section 391.41 — Physical Qualifications for Drivers to be medically qualified. These regulations require CDL holders to have clear vision, at least 20/40 with or without glasses/contacts (what you can see at 20 feet, someone with perfect vision can see at 40). Your eyes can see side-to-side normally and you can recognize the colors on traffic signs and signals — red, amber and green.

The challenge is that “having” good vision and “using” good vision are two separate things. Consider the following safety ideas when discussing how to use your vision to the best of your ability when driving a tow truck or car carrier.

Field of Vision

Safe driving depends on your ability to notice many things at once. Our eyes provide two types of vision: “central” and “peripheral” or side vision. Central vision allows us to make important judgments like estimating distance

and identifying hazards on the road ahead, whereas peripheral vision helps us detect events to the side even when we're not looking directly at them. Many driving mistakes are caused by bad habits when drivers use their vision ineffectively.

Attention Disengagement

“Attention disengagement” is the fancy term used to describe how a simple conversation can affect a driver's ability to focus on the road. According to a new study from the University of Iowa, drivers engaged in a conversation, either over the phone or with a passenger, are slower to recognize and respond to something new that pops up in their field of view. Researchers found that test subjects talking to someone took about twice as long to identify a new object in front of them compared with someone who is not talking. To make matters worse, the longer they spoke the worse it got. When possible, limit your conversations and keep your eyes on the road.

Scanning Ahead

When driving your truck, it's important to be aware of your surroundings as many traffic crashes can be prevented by practicing good visual acuity. Visual acuity is the ability to

see hazards as they present themselves in front of you. It can be obtained only by scanning the road ahead as you drive. In more urban, congested areas, scan about 1 to 1-1/2 blocks in front of you. On open roads, the formula changes depending on your speed, but generally you should aim high in your steering and look 12 to 15 seconds ahead of your vehicle. For reference, when driving 60 mph, 15 seconds is about one-quarter of a mile, and at 30 mph, 15 seconds is only about one-eighth of a mile. Start braking early if you see hazards or if traffic ahead is slowing. By constantly scanning you maintain the ability to react to problems before they are problems.

Traffic Signals

When you see that a signal has been green for a long time (AKA “stale green”) it is likely going to turn yellow, then red, soon. When you see this be prepared and react accordingly. In a city, you get a heads-up on a signal change by observing the crosswalk light. If the walk light is blinking, that means the traffic signal will soon change.

Wrap Up

It can be a challenge to absorb everything going on around you, especially when driving in high-traffic cities. Be diligent and focused to be aware of what's happening ahead, alongside and behind you. The best drivers are aware that they must be aware.

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 patrick@towingexpert.com.



This article is a part of TowSafe, a safety program designed for towing operators. For more information contact April at 407-706-6796.