



Hazards of Changing Lanes

Instructor Notes: Using your turn signals when changing lanes is more than a courtesy – in almost all states, it's required by law. Knowing this, consider using this topic to start your year off right by hosting a short safety meeting with your towing operators discussing the hazards associated with changing lanes. Dangerous maneuvers can have serious results.

Before turn signals

became common, drivers were required to roll down their window and stick their arms out, rain or shine, to signal their intentions. Buick was the first automaker to offer factory-installed turn signals. Its 1939 models featured the "Flash-Way Directional Signal" only on the rear lights. The 1940 models added front indicators and a self-canceling mechanism. In the seven decades since, the technology hasn't changed much. Turn signals became standard equipment on most cars during the 1960s. In 1968, the federal government required that front turn signals have an amber-colored lens while the rear could be either red or amber. Those standards still exist today.

What's the Problem?

In 2015, over 35,000 people died in motor vehicle crashes, up 7.2 percent from 2014, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and unfortunately, the increase is the highest in almost 50 years. Sadly, some of the crashes are caused by simple driver errors such as attempting to change lanes and colliding with another vehicle. In fact, vehicle lane change crashes account for 8-10 percent of all police-reported motor vehicle crashes.

Using your turn signals may avoid some crashes but why aren't we flashing signals? According to research by the Society of Automotive Engineers, drivers either neglect to use their signals when changing lanes – or fail to turn the signals off – 48 percent of the time. And when making a turn the failure rate is around 25 percent. That works out to 2 billion times a day drivers fail to use signals, or 750 billion times annually. Are you part of that group?

What Causes Lane Change Crashes?

The following is a list of common causes of lane change crashes; see how many you've accidentally done in the past:

- Improper look out, ignoring their blind spots
- Failing to signal
- Distracted driving, including cell phone use, eating or reading
- Driver fatigue
- Driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Driving drowsy
- Low visibility due to weather including fog, rain, heavy rain and snow

How Can You Avoid a Lane Change Crash?

Now that we've listed a few of

the common causes, the following are some ideas to prevent you from becoming a crash statistic:

- Check your mirrors and check your blind spots before changing lanes. Slow down if needed to give yourself some room to maneuver. Avoid speeding up to change lanes.
- Consider the blind spots of others. Remember when driving near large trucks if you can't see their mirrors, they may not be able to see you.
- Use auxiliary tow lights when needed and make sure they are working when installed. These should be included in your daily check as they are susceptible to burned-out bulbs, broken lenses and frayed cords.
- Always use your turn signals as this informs everyone around you of your intentions.
- Only change one lane at a time. If you are attempting to change lanes on a multi-lane road, pause in between lanes and make sure space is available.
- Never change lanes in an area where the lanes are separated by solid lines, only do so around dashed lines.
- Do not speed up to change lanes.
- Avoid unpredictable maneuvers and try not to cut anyone off while changing lanes.
- Avoid changing lanes in an intersection, or too close before the intersection. Wait until you're through the light and then change lanes.

Conclusion

Changing lanes safely seems like a simple idea that is all too often ignored. Take your time, look before you turn, signal your intentions and slow down as needed. Remember: Stop accidents before they stop you.



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