



SAFE DRIVING: THREE KEYS TO AVOIDING CRASHES

On Texas roads, a reportable crash occurred every 57 seconds in 2024. That reality matters for our members because employees drive every day—between offices, job sites, meetings, and community events. While we can't control what other drivers do, we can control the habits that reduce our odds of being involved in a crash.

Safe driving isn't a one-time decision, it's a set of repeatable habits. Over time, driving can become automatic, which makes it easier for distractions, tailgating, or rushed decisions to creep in. This article highlights three practical, high impact habits that help drivers avoid crashes and get everyone to their destination safely.

The three keys:

- Limit distractions so your eyes, hands, and mind stay on the driving task.
- Maintain a safe following distance to create time and space to react.
- Anticipate what's coming up ahead by scanning and planning an "out."

1) Limit Your Distractions

Distraction is more than texting, it's anything that pulls your attention away from driving (phones, conversations, food/drink, in vehicle controls, and passengers). In 2024, distracted driving contributed to 91,442 crashes on Texas roads. The safest choice is to set yourself up before you shift into drive.

- Put the phone out of reach. Silence notifications and place the phone in a console, bag, or back seat. If you must take a call, pull over to a safe location first.
- Set navigation and music before you move. Program your route, adjust climate controls, and choose a playlist while parked. If you need to change settings later, do it at a complete stop.
- Keep conversations brief and eyes forward. Talking isn't the problem—turning your head and attention away from traffic is. Make a habit of keeping your gaze on the roadway.
- Manage passengers (especially in vans). Seat passengers where they're least distracting and keep the seat directly behind the driver open when possible.
- Avoid eating and drinking while driving. Build in a few minutes to park and eat. If you do have a drink, take sips only when stopped.

2) Maintain a Safe Following Distance

Many rear end crashes happen because drivers follow too closely. A safe following distance gives you time to see a problem, decide what to do, and respond smoothly—without a panic stop.

1. Use the "seconds" method:
2. Pick a fixed point ahead (a sign, pole, pavement marking).
3. When the vehicle in front passes it, start counting: "one thousand one, one thousand two ..."
4. Your vehicle should pass the same point after you finish counting.

Recommended minimums:

- Passenger vehicles: at least 2 seconds in favorable conditions.
- Vans/large vehicles: at least 3 seconds in favorable conditions.
- Increase to 4+ seconds in rain, reduced visibility, heavy traffic, or when tailgated by another driver.
- Increase your distance behind high profile vehicles (18 wheelers, box trucks, RVs) so you can see farther ahead.

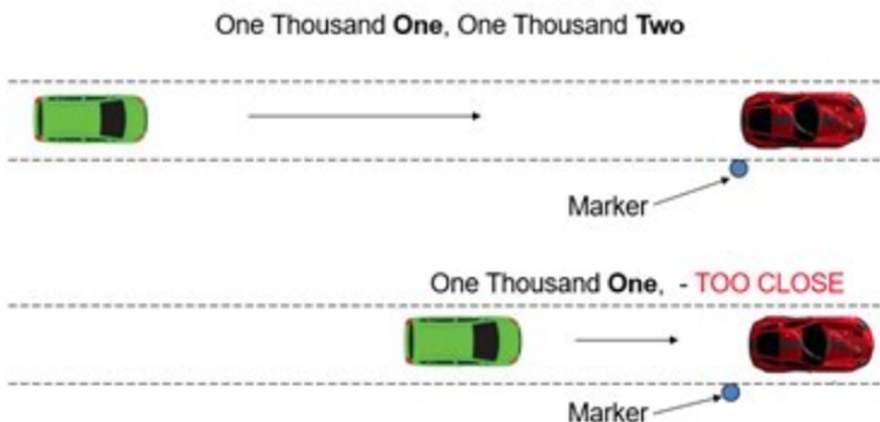


Illustration: safe vs. unsafe following distance

3) Anticipate What's Coming Up Ahead

Good drivers don't just react to the vehicle directly in front of them, they look farther down the road and plan. Scanning ahead helps you spot hazards early and make small, controlled adjustments instead of sudden braking or swerving.

- Traffic signals and stale green lights (be ready for the change).
- Brake lights clustering ahead (a sign that traffic is compressing).
- Debris, animals, or objects near the roadway edge.
- Work zones, lane shifts, and reduced shoulders.
- Vehicles entering from ramps or parked on shoulders.
- A lane ending, merge points, or sudden bottlenecks.
- Vehicles drifting toward your lane or sitting in your blind spot.

A simple habit: scan 12–15 seconds ahead, and check mirrors every few seconds. As you scan, always keep an “out” in mind—space in the next lane, a clear shoulder, or extra room in front—so you're not trapped if something changes quickly.

Build Safer Habits—One Trip at a Time

Most crashes are the result of a chain of small decisions: a quick glance at the phone, a shortened following distance, and a late reaction to traffic slowing ahead. Breaking that chain is the goal. Start with one habit on your next drive—then make it your new normal.

Quick checklist:

- Before you go: phone away, route set, seat belt on, mirrors adjusted.
- On the road: eyes up, space cushion, scan ahead, and expect the unexpected.
- When conditions worsen: slow down and add following distance.

The Risk Control staff has safe driving training materials available and would be glad to present a class in person or via webinar for your organization. We can also assist with written driving policies and driver safety communications. Contact your TCRMF Risk Control Consultant or Jeremy Wade (jeremy.wade@sedgwick.com) for more information.

Source note: Texas crash and distracted driving figures are from TxDOT's published crash statistics (Calendar Year 2024).