Sharing the Road with Large Trucks

Large trucks play a vital role in our nation's economy and in our daily lives. Food, clothing, household goods, medicines, building supplies, and even new cars and the fuel that runs them are all transported on trucks. But sharing the road with large trucks can be intimidating. Because of their size and weight, crashes involving large trucks are much more likely to result in injury or death. Although they make up only 3% of registered vehicles, large trucks are involved in 13% of fatal crashes.

Knowing how to interact with trucks and other large vehicles sharing the road can make driving safer and more comfortable for everyone. The key lies in understanding the characteristics and limitations of trucks, buses, and other large vehicles.

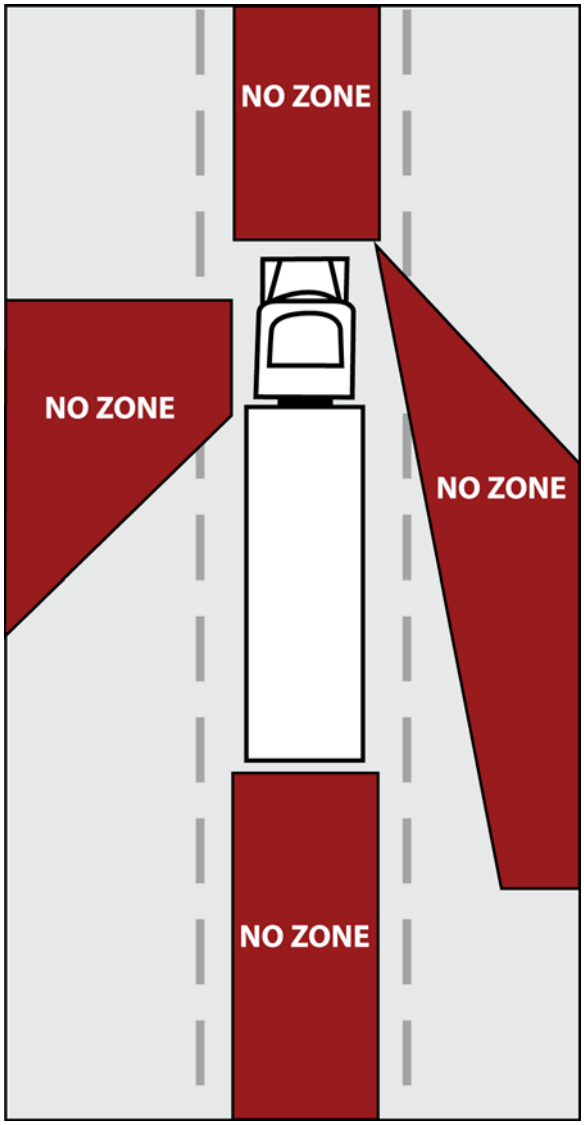
Compared to cars, trucks and large vehicles:

- **Take longer to stop.**
  A fully loaded, 80,000 pound truck traveling 55 mph is moving 80 feet per second and can require more than 400 feet to stop. That is longer than a football field!
- **Make wider turns.**
  When turning right, a large truck may need to swing wide to the left before entering the intersection. Otherwise, the truck's back wheels can cut the corner too sharply and run up on the curb or sidewalk.
- **Have larger blind spots.**
  Due to their size, trucks have large areas all around them where other vehicles disappear from view.
- **Are less maneuverable.**
  Not only can trucks not stop as quickly and turn as sharply, but they also are harder to maneuver. A sudden lane change to avoid another car or an object in the road can cause the driver of the truck to lose control and the truck could jackknife or tip over.
- **May slow down when going uphill and speed up when going downhill.**
  This is especially true when the truck is fully loaded and is important for motorists to keep in mind when attempting to pass a truck.

One loaded tractor-trailer can weigh as much as 20 to 30 cars combined. Regardless of who is at fault in the crash, it is the driver of the much smaller and lighter car who is most likely to be injured. Here are suggestions for how you can adjust your driving to safely share the road with large trucks:

Make Sure the Truck Driver Sees You – Don't Hang Out in NO-ZONES

NO-ZONES are areas around trucks where the truck driver cannot see you and where crashes are more likely to occur. When your vehicle is in one of these areas, there is a danger of collision if the truck needs to quickly slow down, stop, or change lanes.



Avoid "hanging out" in the "NO Zones"!

Car drivers sometimes think that truck drivers can see them because the truck has large mirrors and the driver sits up so high, but this is not always true. A general rule when driving near a large truck is that if you can't see the driver in the mirror of the truck, the truck driver can't see you. So don't linger in these blind spots when traveling behind or passing a large truck.

REAR NO-ZONE – Avoid tailgating!

Not only can the truck driver not see you, but you can't see anything that is happening on the road ahead. If the truck or bus has to brake suddenly, you may not have time to avoid a crash. Under-ride crashes, where a car goes underneath the rear (or side) of a truck, can be especially dangerous for motorists.

SIDE NO-ZONES – Don't Hang Out!

You are already familiar with the blind spots on your car, but a truck's blind spots are much bigger. This is especially true along the truck's right side. Another reason to avoid traveling alongside a truck's right side is that you may be squeezed out if the truck has moved to the left before making a right turn. The truck driver is not intentionally running you off the road; he just doesn't know you are there. Watch for the truck's turn signals, and stay back when they signal a turn.

FRONT NO-ZONE – Pass Safely!

Because they are high up off the ground, truck drivers may be able to see further down the road than car drivers. However, the front of the truck blocks a large section of the road directly in front

of them. When passing a truck, don't pull back into the truck's lane until you can see the entire front of the truck in your rear-view mirror. Some truck drivers will blink their lights when it is safe for you to pull back over. Regardless, you should always use your turn signal *before* changing lanes. After re-entering the travel lane, don't slow down right away, since trucks can't change their speeds as quickly as you can in your car.

Give Way to Backing Trucks

Large trucks sometimes need to back into driveways to make deliveries or pick up goods. Normal traffic may be blocked for a short time while the truck driver maneuvers the trailer in place. Be patient, and don't try to cross behind a truck that is backing or preparing to back. Remember, truck drivers typically have no rear view mirrors and cannot see vehicles directly behind them.

Allow Extra Time and Space for Passing

Because of their greater length, it takes longer to pass a large truck than a car. Going downhill, even more time may be needed if the truck's speed increases. Car drivers should flash their lights when pulling out to pass, especially at nighttime. Truck drivers will generally respond by moving to the right to make passing easier, and some will blink their lights to let drivers know when it is safe to move back into the travel lane after the pass is completed. Car drivers should still, however, check that they can see the entire front of the truck in their rear-view mirror before signaling and changing lanes.

If a truck is passing you, you can help by keeping to the far right side of your lane and reducing your speed slightly. Never speed up to try to keep the truck from passing.

Drivers should also move to the right side of the travel lane when meeting a truck coming from the opposite direction. This will decrease wind turbulence from the passing truck and reduce the chances of a sideswipe.

Take Extra Precaution on Wet Roadways

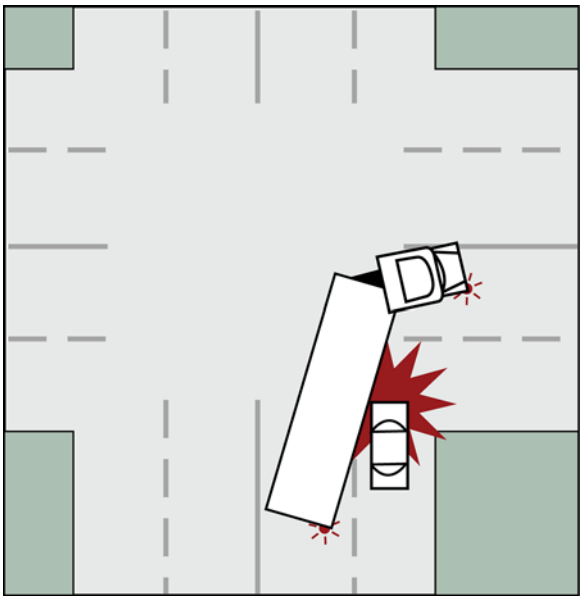
On wet roads, the spray from the tires of large trucks can create special challenges for other vehicles sharing the road. Drivers should increase their space cushion under such conditions. Also, it is a good idea to turn your windshield wipers on *before* passing or being passed by a large truck, even if they are not otherwise needed.

Don't Pull Out in Front

Because of their large size, trucks or other large vehicles can appear to be traveling slower than they really are. When pulling into traffic or crossing a roadway, allow a larger gap if a truck or bus is approaching. Remember that even if the truck driver sees you, he may not be able to slow down or stop in time to avoid a collision.

Watch for Trucks Turning

With any turning vehicle, the rear wheels follow a shorter path than the front wheels -- the longer the vehicle, the greater the difference. That is why drivers of large trucks often swing out to the left as the first step in turning right at an intersection. When following a truck, be sure to watch its turn signals and be prepared to drop back to allow room for the truck to maneuver. In some cases, the truck driver may even need to stop and back up to complete a turn, so be sure not to be too close either behind or alongside the truck.



Large vehicles swing wide to make right turns. Watch turn signals, and do not pass a large truck or bus on the right that may be turning right.

If approaching a turning truck, be aware that parts of the truck may briefly enter into your lane of travel. Again, be patient, drop back, and allow the truck driver the needed space to complete the turn.

Never Stop in a Truck Escape Ramp

Truck escape ramps are short stretches of roadway, similar to exit ramps, with a soft surface such as sand or barriers designed to safely stop a runaway truck. The ramps are frequently placed along long downhill stretches of roadway where truck brakes are most likely to overheat and fail. They may also be found in more urban locations where traffic may need to slow or stop on, or at the bottom of, a steep hill. Never pull over and block these escape ramps. Doing so places you, the truck driver, and others sharing the roadway, in danger.

Also, watch for trucks with smoking wheels or high speed. Either can be a sign of brake failure. If you see this, slow down and stay well behind the truck. Never try to pass to “get ahead” of the truck.

A few other tips for safely sharing the road with large trucks:

- When **approaching a weigh station** on the interstate or other highway, try to stay out of the right lane to give trucks room to exit and enter the roadway.
- **Dim your headlights** when following a truck or other vehicle. Otherwise, the lights will reflect off the truck's mirrors and may distract or blind the driver.
- A stopped truck may roll backward slightly before starting on a hill or incline. **Allow extra room**, particularly if the truck is carrying hazardous or loose cargo.
- Depending on the conditions of the roadway and the truck's load, you may need to stay back even further to avoid being struck by debris being thrown up by the tires or objects flying off the truck.