

habitually aggressive drivers; establishing a road rage hotline; and educating the general public have proved effective in some areas. Individually, drivers need to realize that the highway is no place to lose control. Being impatient and reacting aggressively only places ourselves and others at risk. Bringing common courtesy back to our highways and taking responsibility for our own behavior are choices each of us can make.

Protect yourself by being alert for potentially dangerous or **escalating situations**. If you are the victim of rude behavior, the following advice may prevent escalation.

- Don't take your eyes off the road.
- Avoid eye contact with an aggressive driver.
- Stay cool--don't react to provocation.
- Keep away from drivers behaving erratically.
- Drive to a public place or police station if pursued.

Never underestimate the other driver's capacity for mayhem. The best way to **avoid being the target** of an aggressive driver is to practice basic traffic courtesies--treat others the way you would like to be treated.

- Don't switch lanes without signaling
- Avoid blocking the right-hand turn lane
- Do not take more than one parking space
- If you are not disabled, don't park in a disabled space
- Do not allow your door to hit the car parked next to you
- Use your horn sparingly
- Avoid unnecessary use of high-beam headlights
- Do not tailgate
- If you travel slowly, pull over and allow traffic to pass
- Don't stop in the road to talk with a pedestrian or other driver

- Don't inflict loud music on neighboring cars

- Do not make obscene gestures

The following are suggestions to help **avoid becoming** an aggressive driver:

- Don't drive when you're angry, upset or overly tired;
- Allow plenty of travel time;
- Avoid music which increases your level of anxiety (music faster than your heartbeat);
- Be polite, courteous, and forgiving;
- Remember that you can't control the traffic, only your reaction to it;
- Make it your objective to enjoy the journey.



A Safety Message from Project P.I.E.
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ROAD RAGE



- Do you **curse** at other drivers?
- Do you make **obscene** gestures?
- Do you **honk** your horn in anger?

**If you do, you are an aggressive driver.
Road rage can get you killed.**

A motorist in Washington became so angered by the high beams of another driver that he at first tried to cut him off and then pulled out a gun and wounded him.

In Britain a woman driving a convertible was spat upon and doused with hot coffee from a Thermos bottle because the assailant took exception to a traffic maneuver. The woman sped off but the other driver followed her home where he attacked the vehicle with a tire iron causing substantial damage.



What Is Aggressive Driving?

Aggressive driving can be defined as operating a motor vehicle in a selfish, bold or pushy manner, without regard for safety or the rights of other users of our highways.

- Speeding, tailgating and weaving in and out
- Passing on the right
- Making improper and unsafe lane changes
- Running stop signs and red lights
- Obscene gestures
- Honking or screaming at other drivers
- Flashing headlights at slow-moving cars

Such incidents can escalate and result in murder or severe injury. One or more of these behaviors contributed to nearly one-half of highway deaths in 1995 in New York.

What Causes Aggressive Driving?

Violent traffic disputes are rarely the result of a single incident, but rather are the result of personal attitudes or the cumulative result of a series of stressors in the motorist's life. The traffic incident that turns violent is often "the last straw." A poll by AAA Potomac states that congestion and long commutes are factors. "Our transportation system is strained to its limits, creating driver frustration, anger and, all too often, aggressive and irresponsible actions behind the wheel."

Self-witnessing research by Prof. Leon James, University of Hawaii, confirms that to some degree nearly every driver has feelings of rage and thoughts of retaliation. A car suddenly darts in front of you. You feel an explosion of fury inside—"What an idiot!" It gets very hot. You begin to perspire. You grip the wheel harder. Now you have arrived at the decisive moment:



you either let the emotion die out, or you fan the flames with thoughts of indignation and retaliation. Aggressive drivers do not let the momentary emotional flare die down.

Professor James's research further suggests that children notice that once they enter a car, the adults' rules change: It suddenly becomes OK to be mad, out of control, and use bad language that's ordinarily not allowed. By the time they get their driver's license, adolescents have assimilated years of road rage. Parents by their example are creating future raging road hazards.

Children may also be influenced by driving behaviors depicted in movies and on television. Selfishness, failure to exercise self-control and disrespect for others in general in our society may be reflected in our driving attitudes.

Who Are Aggressive Drivers?

The majority of perpetrators are males between the ages of 18 and 26. Many have histories of violence, drug or alcohol addiction or have recently suffered an emotional or professional setback. However, hundreds of others are successful men and women with no such histories.

Is Road Rage Increasing?

Aggressive driving has progressively increased during the 1990s, indicates a study sponsored by the Foundation for Traffic Safety. The study analyzed 10,037 police reports and newspaper stories about traffic incidents that led to violence. Reports of violent traffic incidents have increased nearly seven percent per year since 1990.

This may be only the small tip of a very large iceberg. For every aggressive driving incident serious enough to result in a police report or newspaper article, there are hundreds or thousands more which were never reported to the authorities. Events precipitating violent incidents are often remarkably trivial; people have been shot because

they drove too slowly or played the radio too loudly.

Sharing the Road with Oversized Vehicles

Add to this scenario 80,000 pound trucks (average weight). Large trucks were involved in one out of nine of the 4,815 crashes involving fatalities in 1995. Eighty-nine of those crashes listed *emotional factors* as a cause. In 98% of the crashes involving passenger vehicle and large trucks, it was the occupants of passenger vehicles that were killed. Sharing the road with oversized vehicles can be intimidating; however, two out of three fatal car/truck crashes are caused by the car driver. The dangers of road rage coupled with ignorance of the driving limitations of large trucks and buses increases the need for patience and cool heads on our highways.

Large vehicles have limitations of which motorists are often not aware such as:



- Sizable blind spots in which the driver's ability to see is restricted;
- Braking differences (it generally takes longer for these heavy vehicles to stop; however, on wet roads or at high speeds, they may stop faster because of better traction);
- Passing differences (on a downgrade it is more difficult to pass them because their weight causes them to increase speed);
- Turning differences (on local streets big vehicles swing to the left before turning right and can crush a vehicle which tries to squeeze into the space on the right of the truck while it is turning).

What Can Be Done?

Campaigns by enforcement agencies targeting