



December 2007

Driving at Night

Introduction:

Nighttime driving only accounts for 25% of all driving and there is usually significantly less traffic during these hours. However, driving at night is more of a challenge than many people think. It is also more dangerous:

- Traffic death rates are three times greater at night than during the day
- 55% of all driving fatalities occur after dark
- 62% of pedestrian fatalities occur at night

Despite these figures, many of us are not aware of the unique hazards or special precautions associated with night driving.

Why is Night Driving So Dangerous?

There are several factors that increase the risk of a traffic accident at night:

- **Poor visibility:** Visibility is obviously much more limited during night driving. We become completely dependent on artificial sources of light to guide us. Headlights allow us to see a small portion of the road ahead, but our peripheral vision is not as sharp. Darkness also makes it more difficult to gauge distances and movement.
- **Fatigue:** Exhaustion dulls the concentration of drivers and slows their reaction time. Drivers are least likely to be alert between 3:00 AM and 7:00 AM. Fatigue is also likely to set in at a driver's normal bedtime.
- **Alcohol:** Despite aggressive anti-drinking and driving programs, alcohol remains a significant factor in nighttime crashes. More fatal crashes take place on weekend nights than at any other time of the week.

Safety Tips for Nighttime Driving:

There are several precautions that can be taken to reduce the dangers of driving at night:

- Limit your speed and increase your following distances at night.
- Avoid "overdriving" when traveling at night. Never drive so fast that you are unable to stop within the distance that you can clearly see with your headlights. For most vehicles this distance is no more than 350 feet when the high beams are in use. During poor weather conditions, this distance can be much less.
- Use your headlights from sunset until sunrise and during periods of rain or snow. When in doubt as to whether you should use your lights, turn them on.
- Prepare your car by cleaning your headlights, taillights, turn signals, and windows on a routine basis.

- Ensure that your headlights are properly aimed. Misaligned headlights blind other drivers and impact your ability to see the road.
- When following another vehicle, keep your headlights on low beam to avoid blinding the driver ahead of you.
- If an oncoming driver does not lower their beams, avoid glare by looking toward the white line marking the right edge of the road. Do not retaliate by activating your own high beams; this will only increase the likelihood of an accident.
- Don't drink and drive. Not only does alcohol severely impair your driving ability, it also acts as a depressant. Just one drink can start to induce fatigue.
- Long trips in the dark are best avoided but if this is not possible, regular breaks are important. Make frequent stops for light snacks and exercise. If you are too tired to drive, get some rest before proceeding.



Road Emergencies at Night:

Emergencies are always worse after dark than during daylight hours. There is less traffic and fewer opportunities for assistance. Here are some suggestions for road emergencies at night:

- Pull your vehicle off the main highway as far as possible. If there is a shoulder, use it.
- Turn on your emergency flashers and the interior dome light.
- Place flares or reflectors near your vehicle and 300 feet behind it on the right edge of the roadway.
- If possible, stay with your vehicle until help arrives. If you must leave your vehicle, carry a flashlight and walk on the left shoulder facing traffic.

Summary:

Most drivers are not aware of the dramatic difference that darkness can make in their ability to cope with many situations. It greatly impacts the way we see our surroundings, can increase feelings of weariness, and also makes us more vulnerable to roadway hazards. Following the preceding suggestions should make driving at night safer for you and fellow drivers.