

SafeDriver Monthly Newsletter

September 2021



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Hurricanes and Floods!

September marks the usual height of hurricane season on the eastern coast of the US. That makes it a good time to go over your hurricane preparedness plan and to review hurricane driving safety issues.

Evacuation – Anyone who has had to evacuate in the face of an approaching hurricane can tell you that your best bet is to leave as early as possible because the roads will fill up quickly and the traffic will slow to a crawl.



Taking Florida, for example; there are only two major arteries leading north out of the state, I-95 and I-75. Since most people will be fleeing the coastal areas, that means most will avoid I-95 and travel inland toward I-75. With the population of a whole state trying to leave at the same time, I-75 will very quickly begin to resemble a parking lot. A trip that might normally take an hour or two on the interstate can easily stretch into five or more hours.

Rest areas, filling stations, and restaurants will be quickly overwhelmed. There will be shortages of food and fuel and tempers will be short. Control your temper and don't try to retaliate against the bad behavior of other drivers. That could quickly lead to a road rage situation. If you encounter any overly aggressive drivers, give them the right-of-way and try to avoid them at all cost.

You may be stuck for long periods between exits on the interstate. Plan ahead and make sure your vehicle is filled with gas before you leave and, if possible, top it off every time you stop. Take snacks and drinks with you because restaurants and stores will quickly run out of supplies. Stop at least every two hours to refresh and rest.

Flooding – The biggest danger associated with hurricanes is flooding. You not only have to worry about storm surge on the coastline but also flash flooding, far inland, due to the torrential rains. Tropical storm Fred, last month, caused extensive flash flooding in the mountainous areas north of Atlanta and all the way up through the Carolinas and into Virginia.

Don't drive into flooded areas! You can't see what's under the water and the road surface could be washed away. Just a few inches of rapidly flowing water can be enough to sweep a car off the road. Most deaths due to flooding are from people trapped in their cars. Avoid flooded areas at all costs. If the local authorities have placed barriers to close a road, obey those signs and find another route.

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Return to School

Beginning this month, most school districts in America will be back in business but it's not going to be a normal school year. The pandemic has drastically changed the normal routine.

With schools closed across the nation for most of the last year-and-a-half, most of us have grown used to roads free of heavy traffic and especially free of school buses. In order to be on time for work and school, we'll have to adjust our schedules to leave earlier because of delays caused by school buses.

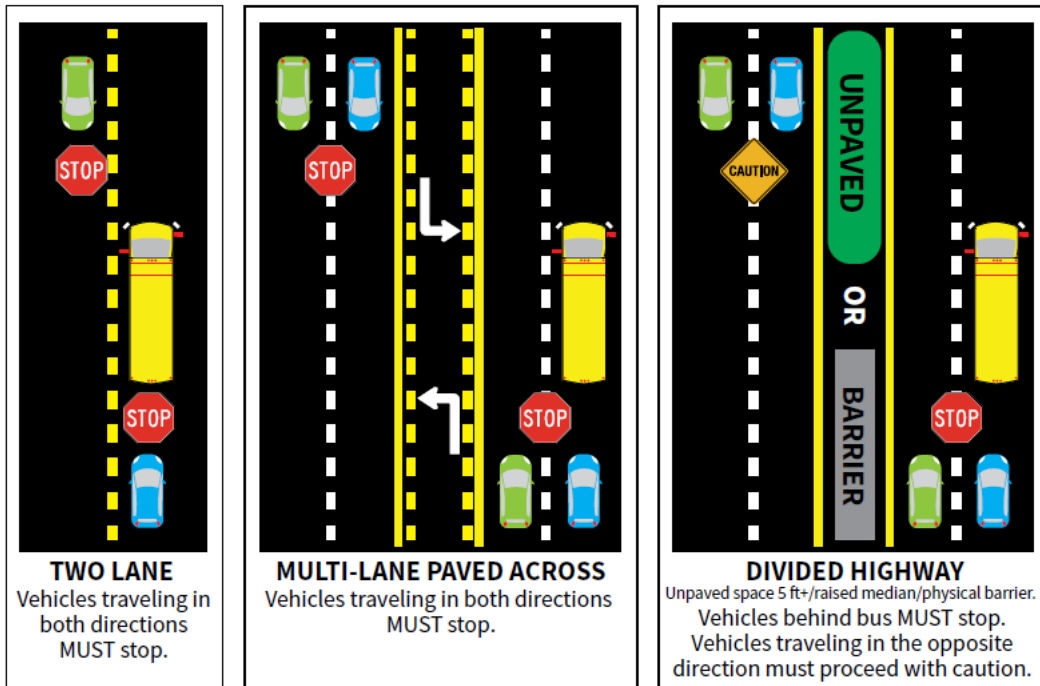
Even the school bus schedules will be different this year. Many school districts don't have enough school bus drivers to meet the demand. That means bus schedules and stops will have to be adjusted to make up for the shortage. School buses will also be overcrowded with students.



That also means there will be more cars on the road when parents have to take their children to school. Watch for extra traffic in the school drop-off and pick-up zones. Obey the posted school zone speed limit and remember that most states now prohibit the use of cell phones while driving in school zones.

Remember to watch for school buses and be ready to slow if the amber lights are flashing and stop if the red lights are flashing and the stop arms are extended. With the changes in schedules, it may take longer for buses to load and unload students. Most student deaths related to school buses occur when students are loading and unloading. Exercise patience!

Remember, on two-lane roadways and undivided multi-lane highways, if a school bus is stopped with its red lights flashing and its stop arms extended, all traffic in both directions must come to a stop until the bus driver has turned off the red flashing lights and withdrawn the stop arms. On highways divided by a concrete barrier or a wide grass median, traffic in the opposite lane from the school bus does not have to stop. However, drivers should still exercise caution.



Vulnerable Road Users

Many states throughout the US have recognized and passed laws that provide harsher penalties for those drivers who kill or injure a "vulnerable road user." Many cities have passed their own laws to protect vulnerable road users.

A vulnerable road user is someone who uses the roads either as a pedestrian or as someone using a form of transportation that offers little or no physical protections for the user if they're involved in a crash.



Vulnerable road users include:

1. A pedestrian, including emergency, construction, or utility workers engaged in work on a highway, or in work on utility facilities alongside a highway, or engaged in providing emergency services within the roadway;
2. A person operating a motorcycle, bicycle, moped, or scooter lawfully on the roadway;
3. A person riding an animal; or
4. A person lawfully operating on a public right-of-way, crosswalk, or shoulder of the roadway such as:
 - A farm tractor or similar vehicle designed primarily for farm use;
 - A skateboard, roller skates, or in-line skates;
 - A horse-drawn carriage;
 - An electric personal assistive mobility device; or
 - A wheelchair.

Drivers need to be especially aware and on the lookout for vulnerable road users.

Those who are Especially Vulnerable include:

- Children
- Elderly people
- The disabled

If you encounter any type of vulnerable road user, you should take the following actions:

- If possible, move over into the far lane and give the vulnerable road user as much room as possible.
- If you can't move into another lane, slow and be prepared to stop, if necessary.
- When passing, you should keep at least three feet between your vehicle and a vulnerable road user.

Remember, if a blind pedestrian using a white cane, or accompanied by a guide dog, or both, is trying to cross the road, whether at a marked crossing or not, all traffic in both directions must come to a stop.

When encountering a vulnerable road user, you may not:

- Pass a vulnerable road user traveling in the same direction and then turn in front of the vulnerable road user unless a safe distance has been traveled that won't interfere with the vulnerable road user.
- Knowingly throw or project any object or substance at or against a vulnerable road user, or the user's animal, equipment, vehicle or conveyance.
- Maneuver a vehicle in a manner that is intended to cause intimidation or harassment to a vulnerable road user or threatens a vulnerable road user.

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