

SafeDriver Monthly Newsletter

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Merge Lanes

Merge lanes are used to blend two lanes of traffic into one. While these can be incredibly useful to avoid last second lane changes, improper use of merge lanes, such as racing, can have lasting consequences to the drivers involved, and the innocent drivers opposite them on the road. When used properly, it is the responsibility of the driver in the merge lane to find space and safely move into the main lane of traffic. The merging driver is the one required to yield, but for drivers on the main road it is important to remain patient and work with them when possible to prevent accidents from occurring.



Merge lane signs typically appear one of three ways. The first, is an arrow with a line that merges into it from the side. This is a warning that two lanes are about to merge into one and the direction of the intersecting line lets drivers know which side of the road the merge will occur on. The second sign looks similar to the first as it is a straight line with a slightly bent line coming in towards it. The final type of sign you may see when merge lanes are approaching simply states with words that the lane will be ending and what lane, right or left, will be merging.

One of the largest causes of accidents in merge lanes is racing. When a driver in the merging lane or main lane begins to race to “beat” the other driver into the first position within the main lane. This can, and has, resulted in collisions that caused serious injury or death for occupants within and around the vehicles. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found in their online survey of licensed drivers that 1-in-4 drivers self-reported that they actively blocked drivers from changing lanes in an exhibition of aggressive driving behavior.

Drivers who race, and, subsequently, crash, could be seriously injured or killed as the opposing forces collide into each other or force one of the cars into a lane moving in the opposite direction. When people are killed as a result of these collisions, the driver(s) could be facing charges of vehicular manslaughter which includes hefty fines and prison time. Their mistake has the potential of ending their own life or the life of another.

Though some of these crashes may not result in death, they should not be occurring at all when people choose to follow the rules of the road. Don't ruin your life or end another's for a moment of fun or frustration that could, and does, have lifelong consequences. In the future, when you merge, ensure you are doing so safely and in a timely manner. When you see someone merging with you, have patience and consider letting them in with a safe distance in the gap between yourself and the car ahead of you. Working with the drivers in surrounding lanes is far preferable over filling out an accident report with them.

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. (2016). *Prevalence of Self-Reported Aggressive Driving Behavior: United States, 2014* (Technical Report). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

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Be-wear of Tire Degradation

Depending upon how many thousands of miles you drive each year, the average tire lasts between 3-6 years. Most newer models of cars have automatic sensors that can warn the driver when there is a problem within their tire. For those without sensors, there are a variety of options to ensure the upkeep of their tires including personal tools and professional assistance.

As you drive, a variety of factors directly affect the level of wear that occurs on your tires. The level of tread left on a tire, the miles traveled, and air pressure are just some of the factors that determine how long tires remain viable on a car.

To prevent premature wearing, ensuring that the tires on a vehicle have the correct air pressure is key. If the air pressure is too high, it can add additional weight to the tire causing premature wearing. This can also cause tires to overheat and blowout while driving. When the air pressure is too low the tire is also at risk of a blowout or distortion which causes only certain parts of the tire to wear out much faster than the others.

Maximum air pressure is listed in the car's manual, the doorjamb of a vehicle, and the sidewall of the tire near the tire's bead. A driver can check the air pressure within their tires by using an air pressure gauge, a cheap tool that's available at most tool and hardware retailers, or they can search for tire shops in their area. Many shops are willing to check the pressure and tread level of tires for free, hoping that drivers will buy from them when it's time to change their tires.

The level of tread left on a tire is just as important in tire maintenance as its air pressure. Dangerously low levels of tread, the amount of rubber left on the tire that touches the road, can also lead to wheel blowouts, cause faster air loss in the tire, and be dangerous when driving on slippery roads. The tread is what helps the tire maintain its grip on the road. When there is no tread, it is much easier for the wheels of a tire to slip or spin out and cause an accident.

To check the level of tread in your tire, take a penny and place it upside down and facing you in one of the grooves of your tires tread. If you are unable to see the top of Lincoln's head, it may not be time yet to change your tread. If the top of his head is visible, you may need new tires as yours are becoming too bald to maintain road safety.

Although it is important to your personal and vehicular health to maintain your tires, this maintenance, or lack thereof, also has an effect on others who travel the same roads as you. Road debris has been a factor in hundreds of thousands of car crashes, and the tread that comes off of a tire due to poor maintenance or a blowout can contribute to this. Not only does improper maintenance of tires increase potential personal harm, it can also increase road hazards for other drivers. By spending 10 minutes a week checking that your tires are properly inflated and still have a safe amount of tread for driving you can help save a life, your own or someone else's.



