

# Driving Emergencies

## WOULD YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO?

You're behind the wheel of your car, driving at a brisk clip on the open highway. Suddenly, a car from the opposite traffic lane swerves directly into your lane and speeds toward you on a collision course. Would you know what to do? Or would you panic? Would you do the wrong thing or would you choose the right defensive action to put the odds in your favor? Emergency situations are a threat anytime you're at the wheel of your car. A panic reaction could be disastrous. Your very survival may depend on two things: your ability to stay calm, and your knowledge of the best defensive action to take.

Obviously you can't "practice" an emergency driving situation. So the next best thing is to develop the skill and know-how beforehand—in your mind. You must visualize in advance emergencies that might confront you, and plan mentally the defensive action you will take. You can do this by studying the advice of the experts. Any of the following emergencies could happen to you---maybe today. Fix in your mind—now—what you should do if any of them happened to you.

### YOUR BRAKES FAIL

You step on the brake—and the pedal slaps uselessly on the floor. It's a terrifying experience! If there was any resistance, pump the pedal. You may be able to work up enough pressure to help some. If there is no pressure and the way is clear ahead, coast in drive gear and use the parking brake. If you need to slow faster, shift into a lower forward gear and let engine compression help. On a hill or mountain grade, you're in trouble. Look for something to sideswipe—roadside brush, a snow bank, a guardrail, even parked cars. (Dented sheet metal can be repaired.) Use your horn or lights to warn other drivers and pedestrians that you are out of control. (See Emergency Brake Usage)

### YOU GO INTO A SKID

Abrupt turns, sudden lane changes or hard braking can throw you into a dangerous skid, especially on wet or icy roads. If your rear end starts to slide, take your foot off the gas at once. Your first instinct may be to turn hard away from the direction of the skid. Don't! That will really spin you into a crash. Instead, turn your wheels in the same direction the rear of the car is skidding. But be careful about it—don't over steer. You'll be able to "feel" when the car regains rolling traction. Then straighten the wheels.

By all means, never hit the brakes during a side skid correction. For the fastest stop with the least chance of causing a side skid, pump your brakes with a hard, rapid jabbing and releasing of the brakes.

### YOUR ACCELERATOR STICKS

You let up on the gas pedal and nothing happens. Keep cool—this is one of the easiest of driving emergencies to handle. If you're on the open highway and there's plenty of room ahead, try to pull the pedal up with the toe of your shoe or have a front seat passenger do it. Don't reach down yourself and take your attention from the road. But on some cars there is no connection between the pedal and throttle linkage; check the type you have. If there isn't time, simply turn off the ignition and brake to a stop. But remember—with power brakes and steering, turning off the engine will make steering and braking hard work. Be ready for the stiffness and bear down. If a quick stop or maneuvering is necessary, you can leave the power on and shift into neutral or depress the clutch. But get stopped in a hurry and shut off the engine at once—a motor racing without load can tear itself to pieces quickly.

**SAFEST 1 DRIVING COLLEGE**  
**1-866-723-3781      FAX: 925-427-6563**  
**1-866-SAFEST1      CALL: 925-473-0996**  
**395 Railroad Ave Suite 5 Pittsburg, Ca. 94565**

## **YOU HAVE A BLOWOUT**

Keep a firm and steady grip on the steering wheel—and don't over steer to correct the swerve or pull. If a front tire goes, there will be a strong pull toward the side with the blowout. A rear blowout tends to cause weaving of the rear end. Above all, don't slam on the brakes! Brake smoothly— but easy does it, Sudden braking may throw you into a spin or out of control. Get onto the shoulder and limp along until you find a place level enough to change the tire safely. Day or night, put out flares or other warning device and turn on flashers.

## **YOUR HEADLIGHTS GO OUT**

There's only one thing to do if your headlights go out and you're suddenly plunged into darkness—hold a straight steering course and brake as hard as you can without throwing yourself into a skid. Then ease onto the shoulder as far from a traffic lane as you can get. The idea is to pull your speed down quickly before a slight steering error takes you off the road. Once stopped, set out flares or use a flashlight to warn oncoming traffic. Use the four-way flasher if they are operable. If everything is dead—radio, blower. Interior lights. etc. —the problem probably is the battery cables. Check the terminals at both ends. If only the headlamps are out, the circuit breaker has opened. Since it is heat actuated, it should open and close, giving you intermittent light to help you to safety -

## **YOUR CAR CATCHES FIRE**

Most car fires are caused by a short circuit in the electrical system. It's almost impossible to disconnect battery terminals without tools. So don't waste time. Get the jack handle from the trunk and rip loose any burning wires. They are a lot less expensive to replace than a burned-out car. If you don't carry a fire extinguisher, try to smother burning wires with a large article of clothing. Don't grab burning wires with your bare hands: use a heavy cloth or article of clothing because an electrical bum can be serious (while autos use only 12 volts, amperage or current can be relatively high in a malfunction. if the fire is beyond your control, get away from the car before the gas tank explodes. Try to flag down a trucker —they usually carry efficient extinguishers.

## **YOU MUST STOP ON A HIGHWAY**

On an expressway with paved shoulders, signal and pull off at near traffic speed, then slow down. Where the shoulder is unpaved, signal a right turn and slow down to a safe speed before turning off. Leave low-beam headlights on in dusk, darkness or bad weather, turn on interior lights and four-way flashers if you have them. If you must stop close to a traffic lane, on a curve, over a hill or in any risky location, get everyone out of the car and well away from traffic. By all means, don't obscure taillights at night by standing or working behind car. Day or night, place a flare or other warning device just behind the car and another at least 300 feet back (that's about 120 paces). Raise the hood and tie a white handkerchief to the antenna or left door handle as a signal if you need help.

## **YOUR HOOD FLIES UP**

Brake smoothly and ease onto the shoulder. You'll have to depend on the view from your left window for steering reference. Or on some cars you may be able to peek through the gap under the hinge edge of the hood. Make it a habit to check and make sure you or the attendant secured the latch on the hood after a service station stop.

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## **YOU ARE ON A COLLISION COURSE**

Suddenly your blood chills! Another car is speeding toward you in your lane—a head-on crash looms! Is he drunk, asleep, ill, inattentive—no matter. You'll need to keep all your wits about you to avoid the worst of all highway accidents.

Brake hard—every mile you take off your speed reduces the impact force. Head for the right shoulder and give him the entire road. If there's time, lean on the horn and flash your lights. If he continues toward you, take the ditch or any open ground to the right free of solid obstructions. Remember that any alternative, even a roll-over, gives you a better chance than a head-on collision. Whatever you do, don't try to outguess him and swerve to the left around him. He may recover at the last instant and instinctively veer back into his own lane—to hit you head-on.

## **YOUR CAR PLUNGES INTO WATER**

Submersion is about the most unpredictable of all auto accidents, both in the way the car will perform and the way people will act. Water causes more unreasoning panic than any other emergency. A few tips have grown out of actual tests. A car with windows and doors closed will float from 3 to 10 minutes. The best escape route is through a window. It is difficult to open a door against water pressure, but a window can be rolled down easily. Power windows may short out, so try to open them immediately. Tempered glass in the side and rear windows of today's cars can be broken only with a heavy, hard object. A front-engine car will sink nose first, and some air may be pushed to the rear near the roof. When pressure inside and out is equalized, it is easier to open a door. Remember that 3 to 5 minutes is a lot of time in an emergency. If your seat belts are fastened so you won't be knocked out—and if you keep your head—there's usually time to escape.