

# DRIVING INFORMATION FOR LAFAYETTE COLLEGE STUDENTS

The following information is excerpted from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's (PennDOT's) **JustDrivePA** program. Additional information can be found at <http://www.justdrivepa.org/>.

Vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among 16-24 year olds. Some key contributors to crashes involving teen drivers in Pennsylvania include driver inexperience, driver distractions, driving too fast for conditions and improper or careless turning.

- Start SMART: S SEAT belt on, seat adjusted  
M MIRRORS adjusted and clear  
A AIR conditioning, heating and defrost controls set  
R RADIO and audio panel set  
T THOROUGHLY check the area for traffic, people or objects
- Stay SMART S Watch your SPEED  
M Frequently check your MIRRORS  
A AVOID distractions  
R Remember the RULES of the road in the area you are traveling (e.g. maximum speed limit postings in the Commonwealth is 65 mph)  
T Give yourself enough TIME to reach your destination
- Don't drink and drive. Drinking under the age of 21 is illegal.
- Avoid sedating medications—check your labels or ask your doctor.
- Don't talk or text on your cell phone while driving.
- Obey the speed limit. Going too fast gives you less time to react.
- Don't eat or drink while driving.
- Plan ahead – know where you are going and get directions.
- Leave early allowing plenty of time to get to your destination.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Get adequate sleep – most adults need 7-9 hours to maintain proper alertness during the day.
- Schedule proper breaks – about every 100 miles or 2 hours during long trips.
- Arrange for a travel companion – someone to talk with and share the driving.

## **DRIVING HABITS**

### *Aggressive Driving*

Speeding and other aggressive driving behaviors are among the leading causes of highway crashes and fatalities in Pennsylvania. However, many drivers don't realize they are in fact, aggressive drivers.

If you answer yes to any of these questions, you may be an aggressive driver and are putting yourself, your passengers and other people on the road at increased risk of a crash.

- Do you speed excessively?
- Do you tailgate slower vehicles?
- Do you race to beat red lights or run stop signs?
- Do you weave in and out of traffic?
- Do you pass illegally on the right?
- Do you fail to yield the right of way to oncoming vehicles?

If you encounter an aggressive driver, PennDOT offers these tips for what to do.

- Get out of their way and don't challenge them.
- Stay relaxed, avoid eye contact and ignore rude gestures.
- Don't block the passing lane if you are driving slower than most of the traffic.
- While many people associate aggressive driving with road rage, they are two different behaviors.

Road rage, which is a criminal offense, is often the result of aggressive driving behavior that escalates into an assault with a vehicle or other dangerous weapon.

### *Distracted Driving*

Anything that causes you to either take your attention away from driving, take your eyes off of the road, or take your hands off of the wheel is a distraction.

Pennsylvania's Texting-While-Driving Ban prohibits as a primary offense any driver from using an Interactive Wireless Communication Device (IWCD) to send, read or write a text-based communication while his or her vehicle is in motion. The texting ban does NOT include the use of a GPS device or a system or device that is physically or electronically integrated into the vehicle.

- defines an IWCD as a wireless phone, personal digital assistant, smart phone, portable or mobile computer or similar devices that can be used for texting, instant messaging, emailing or browsing the Internet;
- defines a text-based communication as a text message, instant message, email or other written communication composed or received on an IWCD;
- institutes a \$50 summary offense fine for convictions under this section plus court costs and other fees (but does not authorize the seizure of an IWCD); and
- makes clear that this law supersedes and preempts any local ordinances restricting the use of interactive wireless devices by drivers.

You will not be able to react as quickly if you are:

- Eating, drinking and smoking. These all create safety problems because they often require you to take your hands off of the wheel and take your eyes off of the road. Drivers who eat or drink while driving have trouble controlling their vehicle, staying in their lane and have to brake more often.
- Adjusting the radio, cassette or CD player.
- Talking, texting or emailing on a cell phone or Blackberry.
- Interacting with other passengers. This is particularly a problem from novice or teenage drivers. If you are a teen driver with other teens as passengers, statistics show you are more likely to have a crash than if you are driving alone or are driving with adult passengers.
- Searching for or moving an object in the vehicle.
- Reading or writing.
- Personal grooming (combing hair, applying makeup).
- Rubbernecking when passing a crash scene or a work zone.
- Looking at people, objects or events happening off of the roadway.

### *Impaired Driving*

Although alcohol-related fatalities account for more than 30 percent of all traffic fatalities in Pennsylvania, impaired driving enforcement covers more than just alcohol impairment. Law enforcement also works to identify drivers impaired by drugs and prescription medication, or some combination of these.

One of the common misconceptions that impacts people when they are drinking is how much alcohol they are actually consuming. Whether it is a 12-ounce beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine, or a 1.5-oz shot,

they each constitute one drink. To provide an estimate of the number of drinks that it would take a person to become impaired with blood alcohol content (BAC) of .08 or higher, please check out the [Blood Alcohol Calculator](#) on the PA Driving Under the Influence (DUI) Association Website. The tool asks for the number and type of drinks consumed over what time period, as well as a person's gender and weight. Please note that this is only an estimate and that a person's actual BAC can be dependent on numerous other factors.

Pennsylvania's Zero Tolerance Law carries serious consequences for those under 21 who are convicted of driving with any amount of alcohol in their blood. For example, those under 21 who are convicted of driving under the influence with a .02 blood alcohol content, or greater, face severe penalties, including a 12-to-18-month license suspension, 48 hours to six months in jail, and fines from \$500 to \$5,000.

A vehicle does not have to be involved in an accident in order for those under 21 to lose their driving privileges. It is against the law for an individual under the age of 21 to consume, possess or transport alcohol, lie about their age to obtain alcohol, or carry a fake identification card. If convicted, the minimum penalties are a fine of up to \$500, plus court costs; a 90-day license suspension for the first offense; a 1-year suspension for the second offense; and a 2-year suspension for the third and subsequent offenses.

For drivers over the age of 21, the costs associated with an impaired driving arrest can vary greatly depending on several factors, including blood-alcohol content, location of arrest, and number of offenses. The effect on a driver's wallet starts the moment they are stopped by police. Here are a few expenses associated with a DUI.

- Traffic fine of \$300 to \$10,000 depending on the driver's blood alcohol content and number of offenses
- Towing vehicle charges of \$50 flat fee plus mileage
- Impound fees of \$75 to \$175 per day
- Legal fees of \$2,000 to \$8,000 or more
- Alcohol evaluation fees of \$35 to \$100
- Accelerated rehabilitative disposition (ARD) fees of \$100 to \$1,800
- Education and treatment requirements of \$100 to \$1,000 or more
- License restoration fees of \$25 non-commercial, \$75 commercial
- Insurance premium increases of about \$1,000 a year or cancellation of policy
- Apart from the financial aspects of a DUI arrest, there may also be social ramifications. Court appearances, community service requirements or jail time lead to lost time, lost wages and possibly job loss. A DUI conviction can also impede attempts to get a job, and cause embarrassment to your family.

### *Seat Belts*

Wearing your seat belt is your best defense against injury or death in the event of a crash. A seat belt increases your chances of surviving a crash by up to 60 percent. Despite this, far too many drivers still refuse to buckle up for a variety of reasons.

- I'm not driving very far.  
FACT: Three out of four crashes occur within 25 miles of home. Keep in mind that your College residence is your temporary "home".
- I'm riding in the back seat.  
FACT: You can still be thrown from a vehicle even if you are riding in the back seat. If you are unrestrained, you also pose a risk to others in the vehicle with you.
- I'm driving at night and the police won't see me.

FACT: Police departments are increasing nighttime enforcement. In addition, there are more high-risk drivers on the roads at night such as impaired drivers and drowsy drivers, which may present increased risk for a crash.

- I don't want to be trapped by a seat belt in case my vehicle catches fire or is submerged in water.

FACT: Less than one-half of one percent of all injury crashes involves fire or submersion. Also, national research has shown you are 25 times more likely to be killed if you are ejected from the vehicle.

According to national statistics, there are several demographic groups that have a lower seat belt rate than others. These groups include 16- to 24-year-olds, males and drivers who are alone in the vehicle. If you are a driver or passenger under 18 years of age, you must buckle up. If you are a driver 18 or older and police pull you over for another violation, you'll receive a second ticket if you or your front-seat passengers aren't wearing seat belts.

## **PEDESTRIAN SAFETY**

Pennsylvania law requires the operator of a vehicle to yield the right of way to a pedestrian crossing a roadway **within** any marked crosswalk or within any unmarked crosswalk at an intersection where there are no traffic controls or traffic controls are not in operation. Violators of the law are subject to a \$50 fine.

The following Safety Tips are offered for all pedestrians:

- Wear light-colored, reflective clothing so you can be seen.
- Walk against traffic.
- Make eye contact with drivers before crossing the street.
- Be aware of your surroundings.

## **DRIVING CONDITIONS**

### *Fall Driving*

Fall weather results in hazards for drivers:

- As leaves begin to fall, wet leaves on the roadway can be as slippery as ice. They also can obscure traffic lines and other pavement markings, making driving in unfamiliar areas particularly difficult. Drivers should slow down and use extra caution on leaf-covered roadways.
- When driving in fog, drivers should use low beam headlights since the high beam setting creates glare and reduces visibility. Not only will headlights enhance visibility of your vehicle, state law requires headlights be on when wipers are in use.
- Sun glare can be most problematic during sunrise and sunset which coincide with morning and evening rush hours. The intense glare from the sun on the horizon can blind a driver, causing an unexpected traffic slowdown. Drivers can prepare for the glare by keeping a set of sunglasses handy, removing clutter from their sun visors and keeping the inside of their vehicle's windshield clean.
- Morning frost and icy spots on the road can also cause problems as overnight temperatures drop toward freezing. Drivers should pay particular attention to bridges, overpasses and shaded areas on roadways where icy spots can form on the pavement. In addition to exercising caution while driving, drivers should clear their vehicles' windows of frost before travel.
- Fall marks the deer's breeding season and deer pay less attention and become bolder as they move around more and travel greater distances seeking mates. Primarily nocturnal feeders, deer are most active between sunset and sunrise. Other factors which affect the travel patterns of deer in the fall are farmers actively harvesting the last of their crops and preparing for spring planting,

increased activity in the woods from hunters seeking game and outdoor enthusiasts enjoying the last remaining days of good weather.

There are steps drivers can take to help make fall commutes safer:

- Increase your following distance in severe weather, at dusk and dawn and when in an area with wet leaves. If you are being tailgated, let the other driver pass.
- Make sure you turn on your headlights as the sunlight fades.
- Watch carefully for deer darting across and along roadways.
- Slow down and use caution, particularly where deer crossing signs are posted and increase following distance between vehicles.
- Be especially watchful during morning and evening hours when wildlife is most active.
- Exercise caution when one deer crosses a roadway. Since deer often travel in small herds, one deer will usually be followed by others.
- Always wear your seat belt.
- Never drive impaired.
- Turn on your headlights if your wipers are on - it's the law.

### *Winter Driving*

If winter weather is forecast, eliminate all unnecessary travel for safety reasons and to allow PennDOT to more easily perform road clearing. If you must travel, PennDOT offers the following tips for safe driving this winter season.

- Listen to weather and travel advisories.
- Keep your gas tank at least half full.
- Slow down and increase following distance.
- Avoid sudden stops and starts.
- Beware of roads that may look wet, but are actually frozen, often referred to as "black ice".
- Use extra caution on bridges and ramps where ice can often form without warning.
- Carry a cell phone.
- Do not use cruise control while driving on snow-covered roads.
- State law requires you to turn on your headlights when your wipers are on.
- Use your low beams in bad weather, especially in cases of heavy or blowing snow.
- Remove ice and snow from windows, mirrors and all vehicle lights as often as needed.
- Remove snow and ice from the hood and roof of your vehicle. State law states that if snow or ice from your vehicle strikes a vehicle or person and causes death or injury, you can be ticketed.
- Do not park or abandon your vehicle on snow emergency routes.
- Do not pass or get between trucks plowing in a plow line (several trucks plowing side by side).
- Make sure someone else knows where you are going, the route you are taking, and when you expect to arrive. In case you run into an emergency and need help, someone will know where to look for you.
- If you do become stranded, it's better to stay with your vehicle until help arrives. Run the engine every hour or so, but make sure the tailpipe is clear and keep the downwind window cracked open.
- Do not drink and drive and always wear your seat belt.

### *Work Zones*

Each year when the weather improves, drivers throughout the state can anticipate seeing many work zones. If you encounter our work zones, please keep the following tips in mind for your safety and the safety of highway workers.

- Drive the posted work-zone speed limit.
- Stay alert and pay close attention to signs and flaggers.
- Turn on your headlights if signs instruct you to do so.
- Maintain a safe distance around vehicles. Don't tailgate.
- Use four-way flashers when stopped or traveling slowly.
- Avoid distractions and give your full attention to the road.
- Always wear seat belts.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Be patient.

Pennsylvania's work zone safety laws are designed to protect both highway workers and drivers in posted work zones:

- In all work zones, drivers are required to travel with their headlights turned on. It is necessary for drivers in vehicles with daytime running lights to turn on their headlights in order to activate their taillights.
- Interstate work zones with a project cost exceeding \$300,000 will have a speed-monitoring device to alert drivers of their speed prior to entering the work zone.
- Active work zones are designated as such to notify drivers when they enter and leave the work zone. A white flashing light attached to the "Active Work Zone When Flashing" sign will indicate an active work zone.
- Drivers caught driving eleven miles per hour (11 mph) or more above the posted speed limit in an active work zone, or who are involved in a crash in an active work zone and are convicted for failing to drive at a safe speed, automatically will lose their license for 15 days.
- Fines for certain traffic violations (including speeding, driving under the influence, and failure to obey traffic devices) are doubled for active work zones.
- The law provides for up to five years of additional jail time for individuals convicted of homicide by vehicle for a crash in an active work zone.

## **NON-STANDARD VEHICLES**

### *Bicycles*

Effective April 2, 2012, drivers must allow at least four feet between the vehicle and a bicycle to safely pass the bicycle. Drivers should pass at a careful and prudent reduced speed. When safe to do so, it is legal to cross the center double yellow line if necessary to provide the required four feet when passing a bicycle. Also, no turn by the driver of a motor vehicle shall interfere with a bicyclist proceeding straight on a roadway or shoulder. Persons operating bicycles should consider the following safety tips

- Wear light-colored, reflective clothing so you can be seen.
- Consider wearing an approved helmet and other protective gear.
- Ride on the right side of the road.
- Signal your intentions in advance.
- Consider attending training to obtain the skills necessary to ride safely on the road.

### *Heavy Trucks*

Highway safety is everyone's responsibility, whether a driver is operating a truck or a passenger vehicle. Drivers need to respect each other and remember to share the road. As a driver, there is very little room

for error or ignorance around heavy trucks. By reviewing a few simple facts, you can enhance your safety out on the highway.

- **Trucks Weigh More and Need More Time to Stop**  
A fully-loaded tractor trailer truck in Pennsylvania can weigh up to 40 tons, which is 38 tons more than your vehicle. This means a truck will take almost twice as long to stop as your car – and even longer on wet pavements. Stopping distance for a truck also increases as speed increases, with it taking almost 50 percent longer to stop when going 65 miles per hour, compared to 55 mph. When you're driving in front of a truck, don't slow down suddenly unless it is absolutely necessary. Be sure to signal a turn or lane change in plenty of time to allow the trucker to react. If you see that traffic in front of you has come to a standstill, immediately put on your emergency flashers to alert all other drivers behind you that something is wrong.
- **Trucks Coming From a Distance May Be Moving Faster Than You Think**  
Because of its large size, a truck driving toward you from a distance can appear to be moving a lot slower than it really is. Make sure to allow plenty of extra room if you pull out of an intersection or onto a highway in front of a truck.
- **Don't Cruise in the No-Zone**  
If you can't see the truck driver or the truck's mirrors, then the driver can't see you. When you're following a truck, even in slow-moving traffic, be sure to stay far enough back, and even out a bit to the left, so that the driver can see you in the rearview mirror.
- **Turning**  
Because trucks are so long, they need to swing wide when making a tight right turn. Don't be fooled by thinking you can squeeze by on the right.
- **Passing**  
When passing a truck, don't linger since riding alongside the truck can put you in the driver's blind spot. Avoid passing on a crest of a hill or on a downgrade where a truck's momentum can cause it to go faster. When you are far enough ahead of the truck that you can see the front tires in your rearview mirror, it is safe to pull in front of the truck. Remember, never pull in front of a truck and slow down since this eliminates the truck driver's cushion of safety.

### *Motorcycles*

With motorcycle use on the rise in Pennsylvania, PennDOT continues to focus on improving motorcycle safety offering the following safety tips for drivers sharing the road with motorcycles:

- Respect a motorcycle as a full-size vehicle with the same rights and privileges as any vehicle on the roadway. Allow a motorcyclist a full lane width as the motorcyclist needs the room to maneuver safely in all types of road conditions;
- Look out for motorcyclists – be aware that motorcycles are small and may be difficult to see. Check mirrors and blind spots before changing lanes and at intersections;
- Large vehicles can also block a motorcycle from a driver's view and a motorcycle can suddenly appear out of nowhere;
- Allow more following distance – leave at least four seconds when following a motorcycle; and
- Always signal your intentions before changing lanes or merging with traffic.

### *School Buses*

School bus safety is a high priority in Pennsylvania as indicated by the School Bus Stopping Law:

- Drivers must stop at least 10 feet away from school buses that have their red lights flashing and stop arm extended.

- Drivers must stop when they are behind a bus, meeting the bus or approaching an intersection where a bus is stopped.
- Drivers following or traveling alongside a school bus must also stop until the red lights have stopped flashing, the stop arm is withdrawn, and all children have reached safety.
- If physical barriers such as grassy medians, guide rails or concrete median barriers separate oncoming traffic from the bus, drivers in the opposing lanes may proceed without stopping.
- Do not proceed until all the children have reached a place of safety.
- The penalties, if convicted of violating Pennsylvania's School Bus Stopping Law, include:
  - \$250 fine
  - Five points on your driving record
  - 60-day license suspension

### *Slow-Moving Vehicles*

In many areas across the Commonwealth, it is not unusual to share the road with farm equipment and horse-drawn vehicles. While these vehicles are familiar fixtures on many roadways, they may present unfamiliar hazards. Additionally, many rural roads offer less room to maneuver, loose gravel or grassy shoulders, and an array of sharp dips and unexpected turns. When combined with the presence of slow-moving vehicles, these hazards create driving challenges.

Tips for Sharing the Road with Slow-Moving Vehicles:

- Vehicles designed to travel 25 mph or less and horse-drawn vehicles are required by law to display a florescent orange triangle surrounded by red bands. When you see this symbol on the rear of any vehicle, slow down immediately and maintain a safe following distance.
- Do not pass a slow-moving vehicle if:
  - You cannot see clearly in front of you and the vehicle you intend to pass;
  - There are curves or hills in the road ahead;
  - You are in a designated "No Passing Zone"; or
  - You are within 100 feet of any intersection, railroad crossing, bridge, elevated structure or tunnel.
- Do not assume that a vehicle operator who pulls the vehicle to the right side of the road is turning right or letting you pass. The vehicle operator may be swinging wide to execute a left-hand turn.
- Be especially watchful of farm vehicles in the spring and fall during planting and harvesting times. Operators of farm vehicles usually are in a better position to see oncoming traffic and are usually willing to signal drivers when it is safe to pass, provided they know there is a vehicle behind them.
- Farm and horse-drawn vehicles have the same right to use public roads as other motor vehicles. When approaching a horse-drawn vehicle, give them plenty of room when following or passing, use your low beams and NEVER use your horn as it may spook the horses.
- Watch the sides of the road for mail boxes, bridges or road signs, which may cause a farm or horse-drawn vehicle operator to maneuver to the center of the road or cross the center line into the approaching lane of traffic to avoid these obstacles.
- Recognize and respond to slow-moving vehicle by adjusting the following distance. Farm vehicles usually travel less than 25 mph, while horse-drawn vehicles range in speeds between 5 and 8 mph. Be alert and prepared to stop.

### *Trains*

These safety tips can help you stay safe around Pennsylvania's railroads.

- Never drive around lowered gates, it's illegal and deadly.

- Never race a train to the crossing.
- Do not get trapped on the tracks. Only proceed through a highway-rail grade crossing if you are sure you can completely clear the crossing without stopping. Remember, the train is three feet wider than the tracks on both sides.
- If your vehicle ever stalls on a track while a train is coming, get out immediately and move quickly away from the tracks in the direction from which the train is coming.
- At a multiple track crossing waiting for a train to pass, watch out for a second train on the other tracks, approaching in either direction.
- Always expect a train! Freight trains do not follow set schedules.
- Be aware that trains cannot stop quickly. A freight train moving 55 miles per hour can take a mile or more to stop - that's 18 football fields!
- Do not be fooled - the train you see is closer and faster moving than you think.
- When you need to cross train tracks, go to a designated crossing, look both ways, and cross the tracks quickly, without stopping.
- Cross tracks only at designated pedestrian or roadway crossings.
- Never walk down a train track; it's illegal and it's dangerous.