



# Loss Control Insight

Safe Driving Distance

## The Most Common Driving Error

One of the most common poor driving habits is inadequate following distance. Studies show most motorists maintain between one and two seconds behind the vehicle in front of them. Here are drivers' most common reasons for this distance plus some thoughts to consider:

"I was taught the two second following distance when I first learned to drive. It's more than enough."



"... and when I snap my fingers, you will completely forget that I was doing 87 in a 45 mph zone ..."

Consider this: This following distance has been abandoned by most state DMV's as well as the Department of Transportation. The two second recommendation was derived from testing the stopping distance and reaction time of drivers under ideal road, vehicle, and driver conditions, it was just a minimum. These ideal conditions rarely exist. Even more crucial is the fact this formula never considered how this limited following distance restricted our ability to survey the complete traffic picture. With two seconds or less, drivers can ill afford to take their eyes off the vehicle directly in front to identify risks further ahead, to the sides or behind. The resulting limited information often leads to late, hasty reactions which expose drivers to unnecessary risk and cause greater wear and tear on the vehicle.

"If I carry a larger following distance other drivers will constantly cut in and force me to drop back. This will happen again and again and soon I'll be behind schedule."

Consider this: A very common perception is that maintaining more than 1 to 2 seconds will invite more drivers to cut in and thus cause us to be constantly dropping back in traffic. The roots of this concern are more emotional than logical. The truth is that when this happens, someone else usually is leaving our lane farther up ahead. It all balances out. The net difference rarely has any impact on our schedule. Here's why... Let's assume that a driver who cuts in maintains a following distance of 2 seconds and let's be liberal and add another half second to account for that vehicle's length. That means this infringement added 2.5 seconds to our schedule. Even if this occurred as much as 40 times in a day's driving (very high), it would only add 100 seconds over the total day. And, that's assuming none of these vehicles ever leave your lane (most of them will).

So what is the proper following distance?

At least four seconds is recommended. Here's how you measure it: When the vehicle in front passes a fixed object such as a telephone pole or an overpass, count one thousand one, one thousand two... You should get to at least the count of one thousand four before passing that same fixed point. The truth is the biggest barrier to maintaining our recommended following distance is just our own pre-existing tendencies. It is instinctive for most drivers to actively fill space, not create it. And, as a shorter following distance is the habit for almost every driver, it feels awkward to carry a greater distance. Try the four second rule next time you are behind the wheel. You'll be amazed by the increased visibility and greatly reduced risk achieved for you and your passengers.

As always ~ be safe!