



There's **NO** EXCUSE FOR BAD DRIVING

Nearly every driver has a reason to justify speeding, talking on a cell phone while at the wheel, or following too closely. A safe driving training expert rebuffs those excuses.

By Phil Moser

Excuses, excuses, excuses. Every driver has them. Excuses why they need to use their cell phone while driving. Excuses why they can't keep a safe following distance. Excuses why they speed. If business drivers would honestly confess some of the things they have done while driving, it would probably make most fleet and safety managers cringe.

Here are a few examples of "confessions" from drivers and the excuses they provide to validate the way they drive.

CONFESSON 1 "I use my phone on a regular basis while I am driving."

The typical excuse for using the phone while driving is: "Driving is downtime. My schedule is so hectic, it's the only time I have to catch up on my phone calls."

RESPONSE

Bunk! Driving is not "down time." Actually, driving is a multitask job. You must do several things at once to operate a vehicle safely. If you are on the phone while driving, the task of driving will not receive the attention it deserves.

Studies have shown that drivers who are on the phone while driving are as likely to crash as a person with blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 percent. That is the point at which people are considered intoxicated in all 50 states in the U.S. and all the provinces in Canada. There aren't many people who would say it is okay to drive while drunk. However, some people become indignant if asked to hang up the cell phone while driving.

Many drivers believe it is safe to phone and drive if they use a hands-free device. While keeping two hands on the wheel is better than one-handed driving, this isn't the primary safety concern in using a phone while driving. Not paying attention to driving is what makes this practice so unsafe. The same studies that discovered phoning and driving is equivalent to drunk driving have found the use of a hands-free device is just as risky as using a hand-held device. It is the

distraction of the phone call that creates the hazard.

As for the argument that using a hands-free device while driving is no more unsafe than talking to a passenger, studies have shown that this assertion is not true. It takes more cognitive ability to carry on a phone conversation than to converse with a passenger. Additionally, if something happens on the road during a driver-passenger conversation, the passenger stops talking, thereby eliminating the

At a Glance

Safe driving behaviors include:

- Managing schedules to eliminate cell phone use, including hands-free devices, while driving.
- Following at a safe distance, even in heavy traffic.
- Staying off snow-covered or icy roads.
- Calling ahead when late for a meeting.

distraction of the conversation.

When a driver's schedule is so hectic the only time he or she can make phone calls is while driving, another major safety issue must be addressed — the overloaded schedule. Drivers should build time into their schedules to conduct phone calls while safely and legally parked. After the calls are completed, safe drivers put the phone away, let the calls go to voicemail, and focus on the task of driving.

CONFESSION 2 “I don’t maintain a safe following distance.”

The excuse that usually goes along with this confession is: “I tailgate so that other cars don’t pull into the space between me and the car I’m following.”

RESPONSE

Drivers from all areas delight in telling horror stories of certain roads they travel on which traffic and drivers are so bad, it is impossible to maintain a safe following distance. The truth is, no matter what highway or byway, traffic is congested and drivers are aggressive everywhere. All drivers have to deal with this reality.

Rear-end collisions are the most common crash every year. They occur for two reasons: inattention while driving (see confession #1) and following too closely.

The proper distance to maintain on a dry road is at least two seconds of space. When the rear of the vehicle in front of you passes a mark, count one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two. If the front of your vehicle reaches that mark before one-thousand-two, you are following too closely.

There are times when it is difficult to maintain that space. Just as a driver gains a safe space, somebody pulls in front and takes it away. It can be frustrating and there is no magical solution. To maintain a safe following distance, drivers must put forth a diligent and consistent effort. Once a driver becomes used to maintaining a safety cushion to the front, it

becomes a natural habit.

Remember to adjust the following distance for different weather conditions. On a wet road surface, a safe following distance is at least four seconds. At the beginning of a snowfall, increase the distance to six seconds. If snow becomes heavy, or in icy conditions, park the vehicle. There are three ways to control a vehicle — steering, braking, and accelerating. None of these control methods works on a snow-covered or icy surface. Even if you think you can control your vehicle in these conditions, what’s stopping another car from sliding into you? It is best to simply get off the road.

CONFESSION 3 “I consistently travel at speeds well above posted speed limits.”

A few excuses accompany this confession:

Excuse 1. “When I am late for an appointment, I increase my speed so that I get there on time.”

Excuse 2. “I keep up with the flow of the traffic. If they speed, I speed.”

RESPONSE – EXCUSE 1

People who constantly run late need to evaluate their time management skills. A driver who is always late for appointments must build more travel time into his or her schedule. In reality, speeding rarely helps make up time. Any ground gained by speeding is quickly eliminated at the next red light or traffic jam.

When you are running late, it seems every light is red, you get behind a school bus that must pick up children every 15 feet, or you have a police car following you. With every red light and school bus stop, the pressure to get to your appointment increases, pressure that leads to speeding and unnecessary risks.

When running late for an appointment, safely park your

vehicle and call ahead. Under a worst-case scenario, the appointment must be rescheduled. The best-case, and more likely, scenario is the person with whom you have the appointment says, “No problem, see you when you get here.”

Calling ahead eliminates the urge to speed and drive recklessly. It takes the pressure off. The truth is, the person you are meeting doesn’t want you to risk a traffic crash simply because you were trying to arrive on time.

RESPONSE – EXCUSE 2

“I keep up with the flow of traffic” is not a legitimate excuse for speeding. No vehicle code ever written states drivers are allowed to speed as long as everybody else is speeding. If a driver is “going with the flow” and the flow is speeding, that driver can be stopped for the violation. You may feel that fact isn’t fair, but in reality, you were speeding. Use your common sense. Be aware of the driving environment, be cognizant of your speed, and decide what actions are safe.

Drivers Must Make a Decision

We all have excuses why we drive badly. The truth is, we tend to justify our dangerous driving habits. What must be considered is what can happen as a result of our unsafe driving.

What you do behind the wheel can change so many lives — your’s and your family’s, other drivers’ and their family’s lives. When driving a vehicle, your main focus should be on driving. Your goal should be to arrive at your destination safely. You have a decision to make when you get behind the wheel. Decide to be safe. Enough with the excuses! [AF](#)

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