



Unexpected situations cause some of the worst accidents. The “unexpected” can, and does confront nearly every driver at one time or another. Our only recourse is to think through possible unexpected situations that might arise and to plan a positive reaction ahead of time.

Usually, the unexpected situation that confronts you is going to be the result of a bad move on the part of some other motorist. For instance, the other person might brake suddenly or maneuver violently to miss a bird or small animal on the road. In other cases, a fellow whose brake lights aren't working might slow down suddenly to make a turn into a roadside entranceway, or somebody else might carelessly pull onto the highway from a blind entranceway.

Moreover, the driver ahead sometimes gets confused by expressway turnoffs or by construction warning signs and barricades. Almost anything can happen in a confused situation.

You know the way to avoid these accidents is through defensive driving. You know you must always leave an out when there is traffic around. Where traffic is heavy or road conditions create problems, slow down to decrease braking distance and increase the time available in an emergency.

But suppose you are driving defensively and something really unexpected happens? Think about all the ways a driver could suddenly lose vision. The hood could fly up, the lights could go out while driving at night, or an insect could fly through the window and hit you in the eye. All these things have happened; and therefore, drivers must be prepared to meet them.

You must hold a straight course and brake as hard as possible without throwing the vehicle into a skid. Then ease onto the shoulder of the road if you can, and as far as possible from the traffic lane.

Think about the possibilities of mechanical failure. Brakes could fail, the accelerator could stick, a tire could blow, a fire could start, or a number of other things could happen.

The emptiest feeling comes when the brake pedal goes all the way to the floorboard without affecting the vehicle's speed. You will probably pump the pedal naturally, and this might help to build up pressure, but also be ready to try the hand brake and shift into low gear to let engine compression help.

On a hill or steep grade, look for something to sideswipe—guardrails, snow banks, roadsides brush or wall, even parked cars—anything to avoid a really bad and possibly fatal accident. Also use horn and lights to warn others.

Finally, give some thought to all the things that can suddenly appear on the road, and the trouble they can cause. A patch of oil or ice can be almost invisible until your vehicle is on top of it. Then there is great danger of a skid. Water from any source causes skids too.

The tractor-trailer driver should turn the front wheels in the direction of the skid and apply a little throttle to straighten out the vehicle. Only after the vehicle is straightened out can the brakes be applied, then intermittently with the clutch engaged.

When driving a two-axle vehicle take your foot off the gas while steering in the direction of the skid. Apply the brakes carefully until you feel traction again. Then straighten out the wheels.



Another emergency arises if a large object falls off a truck ahead, a boulder falls, or a large animal bounds into the road close ahead. You should have been checking the roadside to know if a swerve can be made to avoid these hazards. Again, if a head-on collision with another vehicle threatens, you may have to take to the open ground or the right ditch to avoid it. Remember that even a roll over is better than a head-on collision.

In addition to the preceding list, there are many more common but unexpected driving emergencies—a child can dart into the street, a vehicle can suddenly pull away from the curb, etc. To handle them, you must be alert and informed. Plan ahead.

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