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SHARING THE ROAD WITH 18-WHEELERS

Wyoming residents are more likely to travel in the summertime when the roads are clear and dry, and the daylight lasts longer. It is important to remember when you are out on the highway that different rules apply to different vehicle types – and 18-wheelers are no exception. Simply understanding some of Sir Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion will help you understand how to share the road safely with semis and other large trucks.

Leave Extra Space between Vehicles

If you're changing lanes in front of a semi, a good rule of thumb is to enter its lane only after you can see the entire cab in your rear-view mirror. Newton's Law of Inertia basically says: the more mass an object has, the harder it is to change its motion. A rig will take much longer to start, and will take *much longer to stop* than a passenger car because of this law of physics. A semi traveling at highway speeds could take the length of a football field (or longer) to stop, so don't cut in front of it.

Even when a semi is moving slowly or completely stopped, like in a parking lot or alley, it can block your view, back up into you, or make unexpected maneuvers to get to loading bays. Give rigs a wide berth wherever you experience them, and give yourself time to figure out what the semi is doing.

Know about the "No Zone"

All drivers should be aware of the "no-zone," the area on the sides and rear of 18-wheelers where the truck driver cannot see a car. This dangerous area is easy to locate: If you

can't see the driver of the truck in his side mirrors, then he can't see you.

The no-zone is dangerous for two reasons. First, if the truck driver cannot see you, he might try to pull into your lane, causing a crash. Second, if you drive in the no-zone, the truck and its trailer cut off your view to the side and reduce your view to the front, making it harder to avoid accidents.

If you are behind a truck, stay out of the no-zone so that the driver can see you. If you are passing a truck, do not linger in the no-zone—get through it as quickly as you can while still driving safely.

Don't Pass During a Right Turn

Pay attention to an 18-wheeler's turn signals before you decide to pass it, especially on city streets. If the right blinker is on, the truck is probably preparing to make a right turn. Large trucks almost always have to make wide right turns, so it's a bad idea to try to pass one on the right when it is turning right. This seems like common sense, but many collisions that involve cars and large trucks are caused by this simple mistake. Don't feel pressured by the traffic behind you or by the time deadline you are rushing to meet when it comes to rigs. Give a large truck time to complete its turn.

Anticipate Mishaps

Trailer drifting and tire blowouts can easily occur on semis during highway driving, so make sure you're prepared to react appropriately if you encounter these.

Especially on windy Wyoming days or if the rig has a light load, it is possible for the trailer to drift into your lane. Keep extra space between you and large trucks in case you need to make a quick move to avoid a collision.

We have all seen semi treads along the side of the highway – don't fool yourself into thinking semi tires rarely blow. Not only is shredded tire tread dangerous as it leaves the wheel of the semi, the blast of noise it makes can be jolting and cause a loss of control by the rig driver

and all the other drivers around him.

Drive Safely

Newton's second Law of Motion says: force equals mass times acceleration.

Translation? A fully loaded rig (mass) going 65 MPH (acceleration) will hit another object harder (force) than a passenger car going the same speed. Remember: No matter who has the right of way, when an 18-wheeler and a car collide, the car always loses.

Whether you are taking a short ride to the store or traveling on a long road trip, remember your physics and follow these safety steps to keep both you and other vehicles safe as you share the road.

R. Michael Shickich is the founder of the Injury Law Firm located in Casper. The focus of his practice is personal injury and wrongful death cases.

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