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DISTRIBUTION COMPANY | EST. 1912

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Safe Driving Tips: Keep Your Cool on the Road

Does it seem to you that the highway is a much more hostile place than it used to be? Do you notice a lot of rude drivers tailgating you, cutting you off, blocking you when you want to pass, weaving from lane to lane to beat the flow of traffic, maybe even making unfriendly gestures?

If so, you're not alone. Aggressive driving has become one of America's most talked-about traffic safety issues. On occasion it may lead to "road rage" – use of violence to settle a dispute related to driving.

A major reason for today's aggressive driving is traffic congestion. Construction of new roads and widening of existing ones has lagged far behind the ever-increasing number of cars on the road. In some metropolitan areas, the concept of "rush hour" is virtually outdated because the roads seem to be packed at all times.

Another factor is that many of us lead fast-paced lives and are always in a hurry to get somewhere. This may lead to speeding and aggressive behavior toward motorists we believe are impeding our progress.

In some areas, special law enforcement and public awareness programs have targeted aggressive driving. Counseling has been tried with some angry drivers, but many people seem to regard rude driving as "the other guy's" problem.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) here are a few things you can do to avoid becoming an aggressive-driving victim or offender:

- Don't tailgate.
- Avoid eye contact with an aggressive driver.
- Don't make obscene gestures or return those of others.
- Use your horn sparingly.
- Don't block a passing lane. Avoid blocking a right-turn lane.
- Signal before switching lanes.
- Don't weave in and out of traffic.
- Allow adequate rest for your trip. Realize that you can't control traffic – only your reaction to it.
- If you think someone is driving dangerously and may be breaking the law, consider reporting that driver to the authorities. If you have a cellular phone and can do so safely, call the police.
- When parking, don't take up more than one space. Don't allow your door to hit the car parked next to yours.
- If someone provokes you, take a deep breath and resist the urge to retaliate. The important thing is that you reach your destination safely.