

Courteous Driving

While we frequently think that doing the obvious or logical thing is enough to be safe, what appears to be obvious or courteous is often backed up with laws. For example, if you are driving down West Harvard Avenue and turning left into a business, you must wait for oncoming traffic to clear before proceeding. As a matter of courtesy, be sure your entire vehicle is well out of the way of oncoming traffic – it is not enough for your front tires to clear the curb and then to slow to look for a space as on-coming traffic must brake to avoid you. And remember to look for oncoming bicycles and pedestrians coming either direction on the sidewalk. Similarly, when leaving a parking lot, alley or driveway you must stop before the sidewalk or sidewalk area.

A reminder also about use of signals. They are required whenever turning, changing lanes, stopping or suddenly decelerating. Obviously, the last two are done by your motor vehicle when you apply the brakes, but for turns or lane changes, use of signals for at least 100 feet before turning is required. Simply put, whether on foot, on a bicycle or in a motor vehicle, communicating your intent to other road users is important.

Thanks to the hard work of Umpqua Transit, our area now has an improved transit system. But this also means as drivers or bicyclists, we have to know how to deal with buses that stop to load or unload passengers. When you see the amber lights, you are to slow and proceed with caution. If the bus is stopped at the curb or there is a protected or marked passenger loading area, you can pass at a reasonable speed which is safe for pedestrians.

With school in session, it is also timely to remind drivers to watch out for students, particularly with the recent emphasis on getting students to walk or bike to school. If you are picking up a student, be particularly mindful of students darting in and out of traffic, and be sure to remind your children to watch for vehicles at all times. And unlike the Umpqua Transit buses, school buses have red lights and stop signs which mean you must stop until the lights red lights are off and the stop sign is retracted. The exception is only if you are on the opposite side of the bus on a street where there is a physical divider.

All drivers need to remember the law about speed limits in school zones:

The speed limit is 20 MPH in a school zone. This applies to an area adjacent to the school grounds with signs marking the school zone and either:

- there is a flashing light indicating children may be coming to or from school; or

- if there are no flashing lights present, between 7 AM and 5 PM on school days,

The 20 mph also applies if there's a crosswalk with school zone signs and either:

- there is a flashing light to indicate students may be arriving at or leaving school, or
- there are students in the crosswalk, waiting to cross, or
- there is a crossing guard present.

A brief reminder that you must stop at any street intersection, including a "T" intersection, where a person is crossing the street. This means "when any part or extension" of the individual's body, wheelchair, cane, crutch, bicycle or leashed animal enters the roadway. You must remain stopped when the pedestrian is in your lane, in the adjacent lane or in the lane into which you are turning. At an intersection without a traffic signal, you must also remain stopped when the pedestrian is in the lane adjacent to the lane into which you are turning or less than 6 feet from the lane into which you are turning if there is a traffic signal at the intersection.

Finally, with the change in seasons it is a good time to make sure you check your tires regularly. Tires that are underinflated or excessively worn increase your chance of being in an injury accident. A 2005-2007 study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) found that vehicles with tires underinflated by 25 percent were three times as likely to be involved in a crash-related to tire problems. The proper tire pressure for your car can be found in the owners' manual or on the body of the car when you open the driver's door.

From the Car Connection, May 22, 2012:

If you own a 2008 model year or newer passenger car, light truck or van under 10,000 pounds gross weight, it's equipped with a tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS) as mandated by federal law. The purpose of TPMS is to detect and warn the driver when tire pressure dips below 25 percent the recommended level in any tire.

But many drivers of newer vehicles equipped with the system ignore the warning lights and fail to correct the condition. In addition, there are still millions of older vehicles on the road without TPMS.

Since underinflated tires are difficult to detect visually, without monthly checks to ensure tires are inflated to the proper pounds per square inch (PSI) as indicated by the vehicle owner's manual, drivers could be increasing their risk of a crash involving serious injuries or death.

As reported in [The Detroit News](#), new study of crash data from 2005-2007 by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) found that 5 percent of vehicles involved in crashes had tire problems – either underinflated or poorly maintained tires.

Furthermore, vehicles with tires underinflated by 25 percent were three times as likely to be involved in a crash-related to tire problems. Sixty-six percent of tire-related crashes involved passenger cars.

The study found that tires with worn tread experienced a big increase in tire-related crashes.

Not surprisingly, bad weather increases the risk of crashes in vehicles with tire problems. The study found 11.2 percent of the sample vehicles studied had problems linked to tires during inclement weather compared to 3.9 percent when weather conditions were not a factor.