

# Hazard Recognition Checklist Explanation

As the Georgia Driver's Manual states:

*"The key to defensive driving is awareness. You must keep your eyes moving so that you can keep track of what is happening around you at all times."*

Driving is dangerous. But to a driver who recognizes and reacts to potential hazards in advance, auto accidents can be prevented. Our goal in defensive driving is to be prepared for the unexpected and react in the safest manner possible.

When a ball rolls into the street in front of our car, we try to avoid it. But, at the same time, we need to realize that the real hazard is in the direction from which the ball came, possibly where a child is playing. On a busy city street, drivers may face 20 – 30 different hazards per minute. Being able to recognize these hazards and respond accordingly is critical in the prevention of auto accidents. To keep track of what is happening around you at all times, you must shift your eyes every 2 - 3 seconds to each different hazard, concentrate on those of most importance, and plan your reaction if that hazard should cross your travel path.

The Hazard Recognition Checklist is used to develop and reinforce eye movement while focusing on the hazards that the driver will face behind the wheel. To ensure that eye movement is taking place, the driver should verbalize each hazard that they recognize. This should result in the driver understanding the concept of eye movement and hazard recognition. A passenger should document each hazard noted by the driver by marking it on the corresponding line on the Checklist. Establishing eye movement and voicing each hazard may be difficult at first but will become easier with a little practice. There should be no discussion between the driver and passenger during this observation.

The main areas of observation and some examples of comments that should be verbalized by the driver are outlined below:

For "**Keeping Your Eyes Out Front**", the driver should be looking at all of the potential hazards at least 12 seconds out in front of their car. They should be able to comment on any objects, traffic zones, signals and signs, pavement markings, pedestrians and other vehicles. This is the first step in planning the safest travel path.

For "**Left and Right Intersections / Intersections and Traffic Lights**", the driver should comment as they approach each intersection on any traffic lights or signs, any pedestrian movement, and the location and activity of any vehicles. They must also look left, right and left again to make sure that every intersection is safe before entering. Intersections include driveways and parking lots. Drivers should be prepared to stop at every intersection, even if they have the right-of-way. It doesn't matter who's right if someone is killed or injured in an accident.

For "**Space Cushion**", the driver should constantly comment on their following time and the space in front of their car. This is the only space that we have total control over. When we hit another car in the rear, it's usually because we're distracted. Maintain a 4 second following time and when someone pulls in front of you, back off and re-establish your 4 seconds.

For "**Left and Right Sides of the Roadway**", the driver should comment on the activity near their travel path, such as pedestrians, parked vehicles and trees, bushes or objects near the road that may hide hazards such as children or animals.

For "**Left, Right and Middle Rearview Mirrors**", the driver should comment on the activity they see in their mirrors. In most driving situations, they should be checking a mirror every 8 seconds to visualize the movement of vehicles behind their car. When changing lanes, a defensive driver should use their blinker, check their mirror and turn their head to be sure that any area not seen in the mirror is clear. Avoid all unnecessary backing and if you do back, check your mirrors, carefully watching for pedestrians and other vehicles.

For "**Speed**", the driver should always know their speed and the speed limit. They should also comment on those hazards that require reduction in speed, such as weather or road conditions. Speeding is a major cause of auto accidents and gives us less time to react to all of the hazards that we've recognized.

While we must react to the unexpected movement of other drivers, there are several accident-producing actions of which we have total control. **Before Starting the Engine**, we all must make a conscious decision to not become the cause for an auto accident. Never drive impaired. When approaching your parked vehicle, look in front, under and behind, scanning for any objects in your travel path. Eliminate distractions prior to driving. And to reduce deaths and injuries if an accident occurs, verify that all occupants are belted-in.

After the vehicle has been parked, the observer should total the hazards and discuss the observation with the driver, while noting those areas that need improvement. In auto safety, our goal should always be continuous improvement.

**New drivers should perfect hazard recognition while riding in a passenger seat prior to getting behind the wheel.**