

# READY ...OR NOT?



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## National Safety Month: Plan to drive safe

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So, it's summer and you have a vacation or PCS planned in the near future. If you're driving to your destination, you can just load your luggage and Family and hit the road, right? You could, but only if you want to spend your quality time facing some unforeseen, but preventable, events that can ruin the best-intended journey. Some preparation beforehand will help ensure you enjoy the drive and arrive safely.

### Plan your route

Take time to plan your route. You might want see some sights along the way, but knowing ahead of time where road construction is, avoiding large cities during rush hour, and where adequate rest stop locations are will make the drive more enjoyable. Using TRiPS can help you plot your course while providing a residual risk level and helpful tips to address your riskier trip decisions.

### Check the weather

Weather can make any drive less enjoyable and even dangerous. Check the forecast for locations along your planned route and change your path as needed or, at the very least, alter when you're going to travel through areas with predicted bad weather. You don't want to drive through unfamiliar areas not knowing how weather affects the roads. If you can't avoid the weather and find yourself in the middle of a bad storm, the best option is to seek shelter (under an overpass, pull off an exit, or pull onto the shoulder) and stop driving.

### Inspect your vehicle

Give your car a good inspection. Checking all fluid levels (and topping them off), tire serviceability and tire pressure, headlights and signal lights, and windshield wipers will give you peace of mind that you're starting the trip with your vehicle in optimal working order. If you're due soon for an oil change, now would be a good time to get it done. Most oil change shops will check and top off your other fluid levels and also check tire pressure free of charge.

### Pack an emergency kit

Plan for an emergency so if you have one, you're ready. You don't want to be 30 miles from the nearest exit and have no cellphone coverage before you realize you're not prepared to handle a roadside incident. Some simple preparation will go a long way if you find yourself in a jam:

- Check to ensure your spare tire is in good condition (has good tread, not dry rotted, properly inflated) or if there's a spare at all. Some newer-model cars provide a kit that makes your flat tire drivable long enough to get it repaired. Ensure you have a jack (and all its parts) and that you know how to use it. Assembling a jack in the middle of the night during a rainstorm is not the best time to discover it's missing parts.

- Throw a small toolbox with some basic tools (ratchet and sockets, screwdrivers, wrenches, pliers, knife, flashlight, duct tape) in your trunk. Many repairs can be made if you have the right tools, saving you time and money in a repair shop. Keep a collection of replacement bulbs, fuses and fluids as well.
- Road triangles or flares are necessary to alert traffic in breakdown situations. Be very careful when doing any repairs alongside the road; we've lost six Soldiers during recent years in roadside assistance situations. If at all possible, avoid changing tires on the driver's side (closest to the road); if not, move your vehicle as far as possible off the shoulder.

### **Follow laws**

There is a tendency when you're on a long trip to want to "shorten" your driving time by speeding. Logic may agree with you, but physics won't. Any incident while driving is amplified the faster you drive — reduced reaction times, hydroplaning, shortened braking distances, and increased impact forces.

Wear your seat belt while driving. Some people find it uncomfortable and would rather not have it on. But by wearing your seat belt, you increase your chances of remaining inside the vehicle, which is designed to protect you, during a rollover or impact situation.

Distracted driving is becoming very dangerous on the roadways, and it's not just texting and driving. Anything that takes your eyes and attention off the road for even a few seconds is a distraction. Changing radio stations, setting your GPS, eating, reading, and dealing with screaming children are all common distractions in the car. Try to do as many of these things as possible before you start your trip. Hands-free cellphone devices aren't safe either. They've been proven to limit what you actually see in front of you, especially if the conversation becomes emotional.

### **Take breaks**

Don't be the guy or gal that has to set a record arriving at your destination by avoiding breaks. You should stop every two to three hours to stretch and get your circulation flowing again. If you're travelling with other adults, plan to switch drivers every few hours to give your mind a rest (and possibly take a nap) so you're fresh when it's your turn again. This is especially important if you plan to drive at night. Your body naturally wants to sleep during your normal sleep times, so just "gutting it out" is never the best decision.

### **Enjoy the ride**

Make the most of your trip. Plan stops along the way to see fun and interesting sights. You may want to see the world's largest ball of twine in Cawker City, Kansas, a haunted hotel in New Orleans, or even something less obscure like a visit to the Grand Canyon. If sightseeing isn't your thing, sample cuisine at eateries along the way to your destination. These suggestions will turn one long trip into multiple shorter trips that amuse the entire Family (and provide great backdrops for cool photos).

So get out there, but drive safely to enjoy the trip!

For more information on driving safety, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.