

- On hilly or winding roads;
- At night;
- On wet or otherwise slippery roads;
- During rush hour or otherwise congested traffic;
- When driving into direct sunlight;
- Through areas under construction; and
- When feeling tired or ill.

**Can you see  
the rear tyres  
of the vehicle  
in front of  
you??**

**“ARE YOU  
TOO  
CLOSE?”**



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**Safe  
Following  
Distance**

**“Are You  
Too  
Close?”**

# Safe Following Distances

Because it requires a considerable amount of time and distance to perceive, react to and avoid a hazard, it is imperative that you maintain a certain amount of distance between you and the vehicle around you, especially between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. We can call this distance a **safe following distance**. Under ideal driving conditions this distance consists of the distance that you would travel during your perception-reaction time plus the time required to effect an evasive action such as steering or braking. It is difficult for most drivers to judge distance.

A great many safety authorities recommend a **3-second following distance** for passenger vehicle drivers. This amount of time accomplishes two main goals. Firstly, it allows sufficient time for one driver following to perceive, react to and avoid striking the lead vehicle if it should brake suddenly and unexpectedly. Secondly, because it is expressed in time, at faster speeds the same amount of time will account for greater distances covered, which is exactly what is required. To apply the 3-second following distance rule:

- Look at the vehicle ahead and observe when the rear part of that vehicle passes a landmark of some sort.

- Begin to count out 3 seconds..one thousand one...one thousand two... one thousand three. If by that time the front of your vehicle has not reached the same landmark then your vehicle is at least 3 seconds behind the lead vehicle. If your vehicle reaches the landmark before you finished counting, then you are too close to it.
- Adjust your following distance by slowing down slightly so that you are at least 3 seconds behind the lead vehicle.

The figures below depicts what a safe following distance and unsafe following distance is:



Figure 1. shows a car following at a safe distance.



Figure 2. shows the vehicle following another vehicle at an unsafe distance, which generally means that you're following too close.

The 3-second following distance rule applies only to passenger vehicle, cars and light trucks. Because of the significantly greater required stopping distance and because the allocation of attention requirements are probably greater for driver of commercial vehicles, we recommend a **safe following distance of 7 seconds for commercial vehicle traffic**.

The 3 second or 7 second rules hold for ideal driving conditions. The National Safety Council recommends adding an additional 1 second or more **for each** of the following conditions:

- Adverse weather;
- When following a larger vehicle;
- When towing a trailer;