

SMART™ DRIVING – BLACKS CREEK IA Video Transcript

Hi, my name's Joe Darden. I'm a professional driver trainer with over 18 years of experience in the transportation and safety industry. During that time I've worked as both a driver and a driver instructor. The BLM asked me to help develop this training video in order to apply the concepts of my SMART Driving System™ to wildland firefighting vehicles. However, what you'll discover while watching the video is that the techniques described in the SMART Driving System™ apply not only while you are driving at work but any time you are operating a motor vehicle. Whether that vehicle is an engine, tender, chase rig, tractor trailer, or your personal car, the SMART Driving System is designed to help you maintain situational awareness (SA) by planning ahead to anticipate and respond to hazardous conditions before they become emergency situations.

Let's get started.

If you're like me, you can't wait to learn another acronym for the workplace; right? Well, you're in luck because SMART™ is, you guessed it, an acronym. The good news is it's an easy one to remember and applying the concepts described in the system can help keep you, your family, and your crewmates safer on the roadways.

Let's take a closer look.

SMART™ stands for **S**tudy, **M**aintain, **A**nticipate, **R**espond, and **T**rain. As you're about to see in the video, these five safe driving concepts work together to not only make you a more confident and relaxed driver but also to help you be better prepared for the unsafe actions of other road users.

Here's a quick breakdown of the different elements of the SMART Driving System™.

First, **S**tudy. You want to study the rules of the road. Know what's expected of you as the driver from both the state you'll be driving in as well as from the agency you are driving for. You want to study your vehicle before you turn the key. This is covered by your vehicle walk around inspection.

You also want to study what's going on around your vehicle at all times, even when it's parked. You do this by examining your vehicle every time you approach it and by constantly monitoring your mirrors when you are driving.

Next is **M**aintain. You want to maintain a safe cushion of space around your vehicle whenever you are driving, especially to the front. Proper following distance is one of the key elements of SMART™ driving and it's an element that's completely under your control.

Something else you want to maintain is a straight line of travel. This will help keep you centered in your lane and away from the soft shoulders or abrupt edges of the roadway.

Maintaining your vehicle is another key element. Your inspection and maintenance schedules are designed to ensure that your vehicle is in peak operating condition every time it's needed.

Equally important is maintaining your self. One of the main ways you can do this is to get adequate rest so that you're alert when you're behind the wheel. Other things that you can do are stay hydrated and eliminate in-vehicle distractions.

That brings us to **A**nticipate. You want to anticipate what other road users are likely to do based on the information you are observing. You also want to anticipate changing traffic signals and anticipate changes in intersections that you are approaching. Additionally, you want to anticipate changing road conditions. Any time your vehicle leaves a paved road and transitions onto a dirt or gravel road, you should anticipate the changes in vehicle performance that will follow.

So what do you do when you identify a potential hazard? That's where the "R" comes in. It stands for **R**espond. You will respond to changing conditions like changing road surfaces, limited visibility, and weather. Respond to identified hazards like clearance issues, soft shoulders, or traffic congestion; and you'll respond to unsafe road users. Remember the "R" is for respond not react.

We end with the "T" for **T**rain. You want to train by using the three "Cs"—carefully, consistently, and constantly.

Carefully means that you apply yourself and remain open to new ideas when it comes to defensive driving.

Consistently means that you are trying to develop safe driving habits. That means that every time you get behind the wheel of any vehicle, you are driving SMART™. Simply put, it has become your habit to drive defensively and you do it the same way regardless of what vehicle you are driving.

Finally, you want to be training constantly. That means that you always want to be looking for ways to improve your safe driving habits, and that you apply those principles not just at work but in your personal vehicle as well.

Let's see some examples.

As you prepare to enter the roadway, clear your path by looking to the left, right then back to the left before proceeding. You should anticipate that another road user may not see you preparing to exit. Other drivers may be distracted or simply not expecting you to enter the roadway. As soon as you enter a public roadway, you are exposed to the hazards posed by other road users. Never assume that another driver will yield to your vehicle.

This intersection contains some potential hazards. Can you identify them?

There's a truck preparing to enter your lane of travel. Study that vehicle to make sure that it stays put. You want to try to establish eye-to-eye contact with the driver to make sure that he knows that you are there. Remember, until you make eye-to-eye contact, you don't know that the other driver is seeing you. Until that happens, you need to anticipate the possibility of that vehicle pulling out in front of you.

Another hazard is posed by this vehicle that is preparing to make a left turn across your lane of travel. Study that vehicle as well. Is the driver going to try to beat you to the intersection and cut you off or will he wait until you pass?

Still another hazard is presented by the close following distances of the vehicles ahead. What would happen if the driver of the semi had to slam on his brakes to avoid a crash? You can respond to this hazard by maintaining proper following distance. Proper following distance helps keep you and your crew safe from the bad choices that the other road users make.

Any time you approach an intersection, you want to study what is happening ahead. If you maintain a proper space cushion, you'll be able to see the signal lights and what is happening on the roadway. This will allow you to better anticipate what other road users are likely to do and to smoothly respond to those actions.

When preparing to merge onto the interstate, you need to anticipate several potential hazards. Study what is happening around your vehicle and in the lane you intend to occupy. Study what the vehicle is doing. Was the vehicle able to merge or is it slowing down? Be sure that you maintain proper following distance to avoid having to make an emergency maneuver. Anticipate and be ready to respond to the possibility that a driver behind you may become impatient and try to pass while you are merging as we see here. Train yourself to constantly study your mirrors and check your blind spots to be sure that you have an open lane. Respond to the actions of other road users as needed to guarantee a smooth transition.

When driving at freeway speeds, be sure to maintain proper following distance. Maintaining proper following distance allows you to better study what's happening around your vehicle. You can see what other road users are doing as well as what is happening at least 10 to 20 seconds ahead. This 10 to 20 seconds of eye-lead time allows you to better anticipate and respond to potential hazards before they enter your space cushion and become emergency situations. Additionally, proper following distance allows you to study road signs, which enables you to better anticipate upcoming exits and road changes ahead.

A good rule is to maintain at least six seconds of following distance between your vehicle and the vehicle directly ahead. It may sound like a lot of space until you consider a vehicle traveling 60 to 65 miles per hour covers the length of a football field every 3 seconds.

When exiting the interstate, you want to anticipate the extra time and distance you will need to bring your vehicle to a stop. Heavier vehicles require a longer stopping distance. You should also anticipate the possibility of another vehicle being stopped at the bottom of the hill.

At the stop sign, you need to study what's happening in the intersection. Train yourself to develop the habit of always looking to the left, right then back to the left before proceeding.

On the new roadway, you want to study what the vehicle ahead of you is doing and maintain your following distance. Anticipate the unsafe actions of other road users and respond accordingly. You could be doing everything right and still be impacted by the poor choices of another road user. Don't allow yourself and your crew to become the victims of someone else's poor judgment.

As you approach railroad crossings, study what's happening around your vehicle. These skid marks are good indicator of past problems at this location. Be sure to maintain a safe space cushion between your vehicle and the vehicle ahead and to clear the track in both directions before proceeding.

Any time you're approaching a transition point where the road surface changes, you should anticipate the differences in vehicle performance that will follow. Your vehicle will stop and turn better on a paved road than it will on a gravel or dirt road. Watch your speed and make the transitions as smoothly as possible to limit the chance that your vehicle will lose traction and slide off the roadway. Study the new roadway, maintain SA, and respond to any potential hazards by choosing the safest path.

When making the transition from a dirt or gravel road back onto a paved road, be sure to conduct a post off-road inspection. Rocks lodged in the duals can fly out at highway speeds causing property damage or personal injury to other road users. Be sure that you have adequate space and time to enter the roadway. Study the transition point and anticipate the differences in road surfaces to minimize the chance of a skid.

Any time you approach a "Y" intersection, you should study the situation you're about to enter. Where's your vehicle going to be in 10 to 20 seconds and what's happening in that space? Note how you can see more of the road from a distance but visibility becomes limited as you get closer to the intersection. Be sure to maintain SA and stay in your lane of travel. Many motorists take shortcuts and make poor choices on country roads because of the limited traffic. Uncontrolled intersections only add to this problem. Anticipate right-of-way conflicts with other road users so you can safely respond to these potential hazards.

When you reach the area of the fire, study your surroundings to find a good access point to go off road. Anticipate that other road users may be traveling too fast for the conditions, or they may be distracted by the fire and not able to stop if your engine is blocking the roadway. Respond to this threat by using spotters to help locate access points and to serve as road guards as you enter and exit the roadway.

When driving on dirt roads, be sure to maintain SA and be aware of areas with unbanked curves. Respond to this hazard by maintaining a safe speed to minimize the chance of leaving the roadway and having a rollover crash. You should also anticipate encountering other vehicles and the limited visibility caused by dusty conditions.

SMART™ driving is a matter of choice. As a driver, you can choose to drive defensively or you can choose to take shortcuts. This is especially true when you're returning from an assignment. You may think that the hard work is done and let your guard down; however, it is more important than ever to stay alert and drive SMART™. You're fatigued, and it's easy for your mind to wander and start thinking about other things besides driving defensively. Don't fall into that trap. Drive safe, drive SMART™, and make sure you get to your most important stop—home.