

The Rules of the Road

A Guide to Driving Safely and Legally

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Congratulations! You've passed the driving test, and are now one of the millions of Atlantans navigating the city roads. The driving booklet provided by the Department of Motor Vehicles should orient you with all of the formal regulations and rules of the road. Yet, there are still some things you need to know to be a safe and legal driver.

Defensive Driving

In the US, more than 41,000 people die each year in traffic accidents – a sobering statistic. Even if you are driving safely, someone else's poor driving can cause a wreck. You should be on the alert at all times. Always give other drivers plenty of space and try to keep a safe distance between your car and the car in front of you. For cars, leave a three second window of space (five to six seconds for trucks), in case you have to stop quickly.

To do this:

1. Pick an object on the road ahead of you.
2. When the vehicle in front of you passes it, start counting very slowly.
3. If you haven't reached three by the time you pass it, you are going too fast.

Cell Phones

While it is legal to drive while talking on a cell phone in Georgia, it is a bad idea. Cell phones take your attention away from the road, and limit you to driving with one hand. In general, if you are concentrating on a phone conversation, your reaction time is slower.

Drunk Driving

It is illegal to drink and drive or have an open container of alcohol in your car. If you are over twenty-one your blood alcohol content (BAC) must be lower than 0.08%. If you are pulled over a police officer may ask you to take a breath, blood, or urine test to determine your BAC. If you refuse, your license may be suspended for one year. Drunk driving is a serious and dangerous crime which has severe penalties in court including hefty fines, license suspension, and even jail time.

Dial 911 if you notice someone else driving erratically, and you suspect alcohol is involved. You should be ready to provide a description of their car, their license plate number, and the direction of the vehicle.

Remember: "You drink and drive, you lose."

Child Safety

Young children need extra protection when riding in a car. Because of their small size, they can be more easily injured in an accident. To be safe, children under the age of

twelve shouldn't ride in the front seat. They could be seriously injured if an airbag is deployed. Georgia law dictates that children under the age of six must ride in the back seat.

Also, by law, children under the age of six must ride in an approved safety seat or booster that is suitable for their height and weight. It is important for children over the age of six (and adults), to wear seat belts. In the case of an accident, they make a huge difference in protecting their wearer from ejection from the vehicle, or other injury.

Do not leave a child in the car unattended!

A new law may soon come into effect in Georgia that makes it illegal to leave a child six years old or younger alone in a car. Whether the law passes or not, it is a serious risk to a child's safety to leave them alone in a vehicle. Children may get overheated, especially if the windows are rolled up. Also, they could be unable to get out of the car in the case of an emergency. Further, they could fall prey to kidnappers or vandals.

Flashing Lights

You look in your review mirror and see flashing red and blue lights. If the vehicle is an ambulance or a fire truck, you are expected to slow or stop and move over to the side of the road to let it pass. If it is a police car, than you are expected to pull onto the shoulder of the road and stop the vehicle.

But don't panic!

It could be that your license plate and registration has expired. Perhaps you were speeding. Whatever the case, stay in the car with your seat belt fastened – the police officer will approach you. Don't get out of the vehicle unless you are instructed to. Remain calm and polite. The officer will ask for your driver's license, proof of car insurance, and your vehicle registration. You should keep these documents with you at all times when driving in case you are asked for them.

If you are pulled over late at night or in an unpopulated area, you have the right to move to a well-lit area as a safety precaution. In this situation, turn on your hazard lights and slow down. If you speed up, the police officer may think you are trying to evade him, which is another crime. When the police officer arrives, explain that you did not feel comfortable with the situation, and he will understand.

Also beware of fake police officers. Just because they are wearing a uniform does not mean they are actual police. People often assume that police officers must be legitimate because of the official-looking car they drive. But even police cars can be stolen or imitated. This is a common avenue for crime because criminals know that the public is especially vulnerable in this situation. Always ask to see a badge or if you are still

concerned, call the local police to check if a unit has been dispatched to your area.

If you don't think you deserve a ticket, do not argue with the police officer. You can contest it in court or hire a lawyer. Arguing with the police officer could make the situation worse. If you know you are guilty, pay the ticket before the court date issued by the police officer.

A car can be a great convenience if you drive safely and legally. You are expected to know driving laws and procedures if you operate a car in the US. Driving safely by adhering to these laws will help protect yourself and others.