

NEW DRIVERS

AVOIDING ROAD RAGE

ERNIE BERTOTHY: Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Ernie Bertothy, Infocast Editor.

With us today is **Bob Russo**, manager of the Waterbury Branch Office. Bob is with us today to talk about the issue of road rage, what is it, what kind of impact does it have on drivers and what can be done to avoid it.

ERNIE BERTOTHY: Well, Bob, thank you very much for joining us today, and we're going to be talking about road rage and aggressive driving and dangerous driving behaviors, so let's start right from the top. What exactly is road rage?

BOB RUSSO: Well, first of all, good morning, Ernie. Road rage is aggressive driving, which can result in violent behavior behind the wheel of a car. And it can cause serious problems on the highways, which could be traffic accidents, and hopefully not, but could include death of your passengers or other people's passengers and drivers.

ERNIE: And one of the unique characteristics, Bob, is that it can happen anywhere, at anytime, to basically anyone, right?

BOB RUSSO: That's correct. Road rage can happen to old veteran drivers. It can happen to brand new kids who have just gotten their license. It could be happening around you, and you're not even aware of it. The car in front of you, the gentleman or lady driving that vehicle could be experiencing road rage. The person behind you could be experiencing road rage. So it's not always you. It could be the people around you.

ERNIE: Right. And inside our driver's manual, experts around the country have studied the issue, and there's a list of some explanations that they give for road rage-related incidents. Can you just talk about some of the reasons that experts speculated that why these incidents even occur?

BOB RUSSO: Sure. I -- and I see a lot of this myself when I drive. Increased traffic congestion, and everybody is in a rush to get where they're going. The roads are a lot busier than they ever were, and people's lives are a lot busier than they ever were.

ERNIE: Right.

BOB RUSSO: And we have time deadlines. Everybody has time deadlines to get to work, to get the kids places, so that's the -- the traffic flow has definitely changed.

Basically, there's been a general decline in courtesy amongst drivers. And not even on the road, but all over there's been a decline in that. For years children have ridden with their parents in cars from the time they were born until the time they're 16 years old, and if a parent has road rage and experiences that, the children thinks -- the child thinks that this becomes an acceptable way to drive.

ERNIE: It's almost learned really.

BOB RUSSO: It is. It's almost learned from the parents.

Also, there's a sense that the vehicles that we're now driving, that they're safer, and they are somewhat safer, but also they're not safe where you're going to be protected when you are experiencing road rage, and you do get into a violent accident.

ERNIE: On page 47 of the Connecticut Driver's Manual, there's also a list of behaviors that can cause trouble. Let's talk about some of these behaviors if you don't mind.

BOB RUSSO: Sure.

ERNIE: Lane blocking. Could you explain how that could touch off an incident?

BOB RUSSO: Yes. If someone is in a rush to get someplace and they are in the fast lane, move over. Don't travel in the left-hand lane when you're on the highway. If you're not passing a car in front of you, stay in the right-hand lane. Don't just get in the left-hand lane and ride.

ERNIE: And there's another term, tailgating, which kind of piggy-backs the point you just made.

BOB RUSSO: Right. Tailgating, you do not want to follow the car in front of you that close, which is probably a result of lane blocking. Keep your distance. Don't tailgate.

ERNIE: Right. And talk about the importance of signal lights.

BOB RUSSO: If you are going to make a move on the highway, switch lanes, use your signal light. Let the people behind you know that you are going to be changing lanes. Don't just pull out in front of them because then they could hit their brakes and it's going to cause a chain reaction all the way back, and possibly an accident.

ERNIE: Right. And you also probably want to make sure that you turn your signal light off because some people sometimes forget to do that, and that can confuse other drivers and can lead to things --

BOB RUSSO: Correct.

ERNIE: -- that don't need to happen.

BOB RUSSO: Correct.

ERNIE: Talk about the failure to turn, Bob.

BOB RUSSO: People often think that if we have a law in Connecticut that you can take a right-hand turn at a red light after you've come to a complete stop. And you can do that, but you don't have to do that. You can just wait behind the person. If they choose not to turn, that's their choice. Wait patiently behind them until the light would turn green.

ERNIE: And what about merging? Can you just talk about how that can create some problems on the roadway?

BOB RUSSO: When you are on the highway and you do see cars coming that will be merging into traffic, they're getting on an entrance ramp, if you can safely do so, use your signal light, get over in the left lane, let those people merge in. Don't force them to basically drive off the road when they're trying to merge. Be courteous.

ERNIE: Right. And sometimes when you're in areas, like say a toll booth area, where people are trying to merge into different lanes because they're not in the right lane to be in line to be at a certain toll booth (unintelligible) too so even just trying to merge in in stalled traffic, it's still an issue.

BOB RUSSO: Right. If you basically see that someone's half way between two lanes, obviously, they're trying to move over. Be courteous.

ERNIE: Right.

BOB RUSSO: Let them move over.

ERNIE: That extra second or two really isn't going to matter in the grand scheme of things.

BOB RUSSO: Not going to matter at all.

ERNIE: And what about headlights? Can you talk about how headlines can be an issue?

BOB RUSSO: Headlights. When traveling at night, or in rainy conditions, obviously, your headlights will be on. If you do need to use your headlights for some increased visibility, make sure that when a traffic is oncoming, that you turn them off. Don't keep your high beams on and blind the people that are coming at you.

ERNIE: Right. And of course, like I said earlier, the entire list of, you know, behaviors can be found in the Connecticut Drivers Manual, which can also be found on our website.

And, Bob, probably most importantly, what advice can you give drivers on how to avoid conflict on the road?

BOB RUSSO: Well, very often, Ern, another driver's aggressive driving makes you feel the need to retaliate. You have to get back at this person. Don't do that. Leave it up to the police. If you feel that the person is driving in such an aggressive way that they're going to cause danger to other people, call the police. Let the police know.

Don't compete on the road. If the car next to you is feeling racy, let him race. Let him go. Don't race him.

If you feel that you possibly are in a frame of mind where you should not be driving, don't get behind the wheel. Let yourself cool off, or possibly, let somebody else drive at that time. Or call for a ride if you need a ride.

And give the other driver the benefit of the doubt. You may have just done something or some other driver to cause that person to have road rage. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Let the person go.

ERNIE: All right, so the best advice really is just to keep your cool in traffic and be patient, and eventually, you'll get to where you have to go.

BOB RUSSO: Keep your cool. Keep your head, and be safe.

ERNIE: Well, Bob, thank you very much for joining us today to talk about road rage.

BOB RUSSO: Thank you very much.

ERNIE: This is Ernie Bertothy, Infocast Editor, and you've listened to an Infocast produced by the State of Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. Thank you for listening.