

# Preparing to drive

## QFleet driver safety fact sheet

A safe driver has the ability to avoid distractions and to focus on the many physical and mental tasks that safe driving requires. Any activity that distracts a driver will diminish their safe driving performance and increase risk.

A safe driver will routinely perform a number of vehicle checks and adjustments before commencing a trip.

This avoids the distraction of attempting to complete these tasks while driving.

The driver should systematically perform the following tasks prior to commencing each trip to minimise risk and increase personal comfort.

- **Windscreen cleanliness.** Check the cleanliness of the windscreen before starting to drive. A dirty windscreen is a significant risk to safe driving and the safest time to clean it is before a trip is started.
- **Check the doors.** The vehicle's doors and boot lid should all be securely closed. Many vehicles are now equipped with dash mounted warning lights which warn about doors which are not properly closed. If in doubt, physically check all doors and the boot. This is also a good opportunity to locate the fuel filler cap.
- **Locate the controls.** If driving a vehicle for the first time, the driver should become familiar with the vehicle's controls before starting the trip. This is the ideal opportunity

to locate and become familiar with the seat adjuster, indicators, headlight switch, windscreen wiper controls, fuel filler release, parking brake etc.

- **Parking brake.** Locate and learn how to use the parking brake, particularly if it is an unfamiliar vehicle. Vehicles are now equipped with a variety of different types of parking brakes including those operated by hand, foot and electric switches.
- **Adjust the external mirrors.** The mirrors should be adjusted before commencing the trip, not during. The external mirrors should be adjusted so that the driver can see as much as possible of the roadway beside the vehicle while seeing only a very small amount of the side of the vehicle. After correctly adjusting the mirrors, the driver should be able to achieve a good field of vision to the side and the rear, with minimal movement of the driver's head. External mirrors have limited fields of view and do not provide the driver with a complete 180 degree view to the rear. There will still be 'blind' spots to the side of the vehicle and it is important that the driver turns their head to check the blind spot, particularly when changing lanes and merging.
- **Adjust the internal mirror.** The internal mirror should be adjusted so that the driver can see as little of the interior of the vehicle as possible and as much of the rear window as possible. This will maximise the view of the road behind the driver. If driving at night, take the opportunity to locate and practice using the rear view mirror anti-glare switch. This small switch or tab is fitted to many new vehicles and is very useful in reducing

annoying and dangerous glare from the headlights of following vehicles. Some new vehicles are now equipped with internal rear vision mirrors which automatically reduce glare.

- **Air conditioning, climate control and sound system.** Set up or adjust the vehicle's temperature control and entertainment systems before starting the trip. If CDs are to be used, they should be safely stowed and readily available; searching for missing CDs while driving is very risky behaviour.
- **Transmission.** Take the time to become familiar with the transmission shift mechanism. Many automatic transmissions are now equipped with an 'overdrive' or 'sport' mode. Failing to select the overdrive mode for highway driving will reduce performance and increase fuel use. If the sport mode is selected, the transmission must be manually shifted or engine damage can occur.
- **Stow goods safely.** There have been cases where the occupants of vehicles have survived the external forces of a crash only to be killed or seriously injured when struck from behind by an unrestrained object being carried in their own vehicle. The driver must ensure that objects being carried in a vehicle are properly restrained and do not move under any driving conditions, including emergency braking and crashes. Some examples of the potentially lethal objects that are often carried in the passenger area of a vehicle are luggage, mobile phones, laptop computers, glass bottles, briefcases, hard cover books, umbrellas and fire extinguishers. Loose objects such as CD cases, coins and mobile phones should not be carried on the dashboard or centre console because they can also be a driver distraction if they slide around or move while the vehicle is in motion.
- **Sunglasses and driving glasses.** The driver should ensure that the correct eyewear is being worn before starting to drive. Searching for glasses while driving is a major distraction and risk.
- **Hands-free phone.** QFleet does not support the use of any type of mobile phone while a vehicle is being driven. Hand-held phones

must never be used. A driver with a hands-free phone should program the phone to direct calls to a message bank facility before starting to drive.

- **Navigation system.** Navigation systems are useful driving aids but can be a driver distraction if not used sensibly. A system with good verbal directions will minimise the need for the driver to look at the screen. The navigation system should be set up and programmed before the trip starts. Once mobile, navigation tasks should be assigned to a passenger, or the driver should stop in a safe place to amend the trip details. The same applies to using a street directory.
- **Fuel type.** Diesel fuelled vehicles are now common in fleets and there is an increasing frequency of vehicles being refuelled with the incorrect fuel. The driver should check the type of fuel the vehicle requires and know how to refuel correctly.



- **Adjust the seat and adopt a good driving posture.** A properly adjusted seat and a good driving posture enhance the driver's vision, comfort and safety. There is also an increased requirement for the driver to be correctly seated relative to the vehicle's safety equipment such as airbags and sophisticated seat belt systems. A driver who is seated correctly will have better vision and vehicle control, will be more alert and suffer less from driving fatigue and will be better protected by the vehicle's safety equipment in the event of a crash. Many vehicles are now equipped with steering wheels that are adjustable for height, tilt and reach (closeness). Adjust the steering wheel to achieve a comfortable driving position without having the steering wheel too close,

while still maintaining good vision of the instruments, particularly the speedometer. The following are suggested adjustments for vehicles with fully adjustable seats:

- Raise the seat as high as is comfortable for improved vision.
  - Move the seat forward to a position which allows for the clutch and accelerator pedals to be fully depressed comfortably.
  - Tilt the seat cushion so that the thighs are supported along the length of the cushion.
  - Adjust the back rest so that it provides continuous support along the length of the back and is in contact up to shoulder height.
  - Adjust the lumbar support to give even pressure along the length of the back rest.
- **Adjust the head restraint.** Head restraints are designed to reduce the rearward motion of the head in a rear-end crash and decrease the chances of occupants sustaining whiplash neck injuries. To prevent whiplash, the headrest should be positioned at least as high as the head's centre of gravity (eye level or higher). The headrest should also be adjusted so that it is almost touching the back of the head or the gap behind the head is as small as possible. The angle of the seat back may need to be adjusted to move the headrest closer to the back of the head.
- **Wear a seatbelt.** Seatbelts have proven to be one of the most effective safety improvements in a motor vehicle. A seatbelt which is worn and adjusted incorrectly will provide less protection in a crash with resulting increases to neck, chest or abdominal injuries. To optimise the effectiveness of a seatbelt:
    - The belts should be flat and not twisted.

**Be aware: the driver of the vehicle is now also responsible for ensuring that all passengers, regardless of age, are wearing a properly fastened and adjusted seatbelt. Penalties apply for non-compliance.**

- The lap belt should fit snugly and pass over the pelvis and hips and not across the stomach.
- In the case of a pregnant woman, the lap belt should be positioned over the thighs, across the pelvis and under the unborn child.
- The shoulder belt should pass over the chest and shoulder bone and not contact the neck or face. Use the belt height adjuster, where fitted, to ensure that the belt applies firm pressure over the shoulder and there is no gap between the belt and the front of the shoulder.



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