



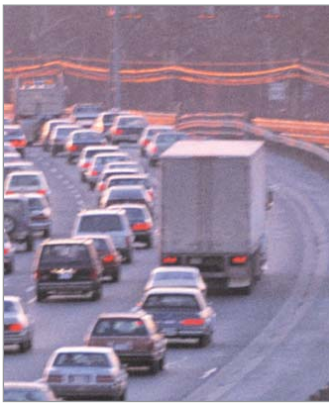
LESSONS LEARNED

One Moment Of Inattention

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What consequences could result if you take your eyes from the road for just one second, or if one second of inattention causes your truck to go unguided for just that one second? The following scenarios illustrate the consequences.



MIRROR, MIRROR

A tractor trailer carrying hazardous materials was proceeding west on the interstate. The night was clear and dark; the highway was flat and straight. The driver reached for his thermos to pour a cup of coffee. But the thermos escaped his grasp and rolled to the floor of the cab. While retrieving the thermos, the driver turned on

the interior light. The light caused a mirror effect on the windshield, which resulted in a second of “unguided” driving. The tractor and trailer skidded off the road, overturned and caught on fire. The driver suffered minor injuries, but the tractor and trailer were a total loss.

COSTLY CURVE

In the early evening, another tractor trailer was on a rural highway approaching a small town. Anticipating a stop for dinner, the driver looked down and reached for her notebook to update the paperwork while in the restaurant. The second or two of looking away from the highway to

find the notebook resulted in the driver’s inability to see and react to the curve in the roadway. The tractor trailer went off the shoulder of the highway, turned over and spilled the load of naphtha — a hazardous material. The driver sustained minor injuries, but the spill cleanup and property damage costs exceeded \$100,000.

TUNED OUT

In light city traffic, the third tractor trailer was proceeding through town at a leisurely pace. The driver was adjusting the radio, trying to tune in to a local station. Having difficulty finding the station, he briefly focused his attention from the roadway to the radio dial. At that moment, the car in front of his tractor trailer slowed in anticipation of the intersection it was approaching. The resulting rear-end collision pushed the car into the intersection and into another car. Five passengers were injured and property damage surpassed \$20,000.

The drivers in the preceding scenarios allowed a moment of inattention to distract them from reacting effectively to changing situations. To drive safely at all times, a driver must:

- Perceive the changing situation
- React to the situation
- Drive safely through the circumstances

Inattention interferes with perception time — that is, the time it takes the driver to perceive a dangerous situation after he or she could have been aware of it. If a driver is intently watching the roadway ahead and it curves to the right, he/she will perceive it almost immediately. Perception

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time is zero in this case. If, however, the driver is looking for a thermos or notebook when the roadway conditions change, this perception moment may be one to two seconds or more!!

Perception times vary tremendously with circumstances and are very closely connected to attention. Alert drivers have shorter perception times than those who let their attention wander to other activities. Any driver, even one quick to perceive a situation, may experience a dangerously long perception time when he/she is distracted by some other “interesting” thought or activity.

These “seconds” of perception time translate into distances of “unguided” travel for the tractor trailer at highway speeds. The picture illustrates the distance of travel for just one second of perception time. If this distance is added to the reaction time and stopping distances, it becomes

even more important to understand that attention can give the driver the “extra few feet” that will make the difference between a safe trip and sad trip.

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