



## Merging from the Side of a Highway

The task of merging onto a highway after having stopped on the side of the road can be a very dangerous task no matter what type of vehicle you are driving. Getting the vehicle moving and merging into the travel lanes can lead to serious accidents from sideswiping unseen vehicles or having a vehicle traveling at a high rate of speed running into the back end of your vehicle because the motorist did not see or understand your intentions. From a legal perspective, an accident involving one person running into the back of another vehicle typically results in the person in the rear vehicle being charged, but this is not always the case when a driver of a vehicle is merging onto the highway after an emergency or routine stop.

In an emergency a driver must consider whether they can make it to a rest area or exit rather than stopping on the side of a highway. Once a stop on the highway shoulder seems necessary, the driver must consider the following items:

- Do I have sufficient space to pull my vehicle off the road to ensure that I am not creating a hazard to oncoming vehicles?
- Is the spot visible from at least a half mile to the rear? (Stopping around corners, or on the back side of hill crests is very dangerous.)
- Ensure that the shoulder will hold the weight of the vehicle.
- Ensure that turn signals are used to communicate your intentions, as it is not common for drivers to pull off the roadway.
- Use the vehicle emergency flashers once your vehicle is on the side of the road, and if you will be at the location for more than a few minutes, place your emergency triangles to warn other motorists of your presence (but remember to pick them up when you are ready to leave).

- Prior to stopping, look at the roadway to your front to ensure that there are no obstacles that will make the re-entry process dangerous (bridge abutments, other broken-down vehicles, etc.).
- Avoid stopping close to exit or entry ramps, as they can increase the risks with other drivers making erratic lane changes or in the case of entrance ramps, may create areas of limited visibility with cars merging from the on-ramp. It would be wiser to get off at the exit and find an area off the highway to park.

Once you have addressed the emergency that required you to pull off the road, now the dangerous task of re-entering the highway must occur. The risks associated with this task can be catastrophic. To help eliminate or control these risks, the driver should:

- Communicate your intentions by using turn signals, and if possible, use the CB radio to let other truckers in the area know that you will be merging onto the roadway. This would give them the opportunity to move over to the left lanes to give you more space to re-enter the highway. It will also help eliminate the risk of not seeing other cars that may be tailgating or in blind spots near the other trucks.
- Start moving forward on the shoulder of the roadway and then re-enter the highway. The side of the road is not a travel lane, but it should be used to at least get the vehicle moving prior to merging onto the highway to help reduce risks presented to other motorists.
- Closely watch the travel lanes behind you, paying close attention to cars that may be tailgating other trucks.

- Do not assume that other drivers will always make the smart choice and move over. We are sharing the roads with many distracted drivers.
- Watch your front, but constantly monitor what is happening behind you, as this is where the major risks are during the re-entry process. In some cases, the driver may need to pull back onto the shoulder to avoid being hit from the rear and re-try the entry process.
- Look for vehicle lights at night. This practice may help identify vehicles that are tailgating other vehicles, or to help determine the other vehicles' speed of travel.

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