





**DOT says that 40% of all vehicle collisions occur in intersections — here are 12 tips, thoughts, and techniques to consider as you drive through the crossroads**

Officers know the inherent dangers that await drivers within intersections. Anyone wearing a uniform for longer than a week has seen & investigated the carnage that an intersection-related collision can cause. It is the ultimate enemy for everyone in a vehicle. With multiple vehicles approaching intersections, all it takes is the mistake of one for tragedy to occur.

Your profession is not immune to that tragedy and the recent death of St. Louis Police Officer David Haynes reminds us of the danger that lurks for our officers every day.

*[...For Officer Haynes, it started at 10:00 a.m. on March 24, 2010, when he responded to a burglary in progress at a residence. He quickly located the suspect vehicle and activated his emergency equipment in order to stop the suspect. A vehicle pursuit began and as Officer Haynes followed the suspect through the intersection of Oleatha and Kingshighway, his patrol car was struck by an SUV on the passenger side. The patrol car spun which caused the driver's side to crash into the front of a second SUV. St. Louis Officer David Haynes was transported to Barnes Hospital where he was pronounced dead. A 27 year old, former Marine, with a wife and an entire life and career ahead of him was now gone. Yes, it is true that the suspect was responsible for the murder but there is another blame here as well. It is to blame for multiple officer deaths and countless injuries each year. In fact, so far in 2010, 38 percent of the roadway-related fatalities occurred within intersections...]*

While officer deaths make the headlines, a daily look at law enforcement collisions tells us a grim story

## **Dangerous Actions**

Intersections pose a multitude of dangers for some very basic reasons. Multiple vehicles approaching at multiple locations with various intentions — intentions about which none of the other drivers can be aware. It just takes one wrong turn, one look away from the roadway, or one bad decision for problems to occur. As a law enforcement professional driving in an intersection, you are either causing the problem or a victim of someone else's mistake. The unknowns are boundless and because of this, the actions you must take to avoid tragedy may seem radical - would you be seen as radical than injured or dead.

## **Driving Techniques: Intersection Clearance, Your Top Priority**

The first step in intersection safety is recognizing the danger they pose and making the conscious decision to modify any driving behavior that could contribute to the danger. For example, while driving in normal mode and waiting at a red light intersection, wait two seconds before proceeding when that light turns green. I call this the two second rule, and practicing it will help prevent any potential collisions caused by other vehicles running red lights. By waiting before proceeding through, you will make entering the intersection much safer.

Here are 12 more thoughts and techniques for your consideration. What would you add to this list?

- 1.** The execution of clearing an intersection must be perfect. Whether you in normal driving mode or operating with emergency equipment, there is no room for error upon approach, entry and exit of an intersection.
- 2.** As you approach any intersection you should determine what type of intersection you are entering. The more lanes, traffic, large vehicles and blind spots, the more danger there is at the intersection. If you have entered an intersection without making these determinations, you are too late and you are engaging in a very risky behavior. Just because you have not taken these precautions in the past does not make you good—it makes you lucky.
- 3.** You will approach any intersection in one of four ways, in various combinations. You will intend to proceed through (green light), stop (red light) and you will be driving normal or you will be in an emergency mode with lights and siren on. Whether you are driving normal or with lights and siren on, your actions remain the same. You must safely clear the intersection.

4. A green light does not automatically mean that the intersection will be clear. Remember, you have to compensate for the mistakes of others on the roadway. If you die in an intersection, the fact that your light was green will not matter to you or your family.
5. Any intersection should be broken up into lanes and those lanes should be cleared one at a time until you are through the intersection. Before you enter each lane of traffic, clear it.
6. Whether you are entering an intersection in normal driving conditions or emergency mode, you should clear the lane you are entering first by looking both ways as many times as it takes to enter safely. Remember, the lane may be clear when you looked right but when you turned to look left, something on the right side may have changed. Because of this, look as many times as you need, side to side to ensure the lanes are clear.
7. When you look to the right and left, especially if you are in a hurry, it is common to not look far enough to either side. To ensure you are looking deep enough into the lanes, have your chin touch each shoulder as you clear side to side. Remember, clear each lane as an individual lane.
8. Large vehicles such as busses and trucks should cause you great concern. These vehicles can virtually eliminate the effectiveness of your emergency equipment and blind other cars from seeing you and from you seeing them. Use extreme caution if you observe these large vehicles or pedestrian cross walks within intersections.
9. If the light is green you should take your foot off of the gas pedal and "cover" your brake. This will cut down the reaction time it would take to stop your vehicle if an emergency arose within the intersection. By saving this reaction time, you are saving the distance the vehicle is travelling and possibly preventing a collision. To "cover" the brake, simply place your foot just above the brake pedal.
10. Emergency equipment and red lights are a dangerous combination. Never enter an intersection with a red light at the speed limit or even close to the speed limit. You should always come to a complete stop and enter each lane of the intersection only after you have successfully looked both ways and gained the attention of the third-party vehicles. An excellent way to gain the attention of other drivers is to change the pitch of your siren and/or flash your headlights. When the vehicles stop, proceed to the next lane. Never anticipate that the other drivers see you or intend to stop.

11. While driving in an emergency mode, utilizing lights and siren, you are normally permitted by your state statutes to violate the rules of the road and enter the intersection when it is red. Please be aware that extreme caution should be used when doing this. You should anticipate that many if not all third-party vehicles will not hear or see you coming.
12. Even if the light is green, reduce your speeds to well under the posted speed limit. Remember, intersections will be the riskiest part of your day. Reducing speed will give you the extra reaction time and distance you may need if an emergency presents itself within the intersection.

### **Conclusion**

It is understandable that some of these techniques may be different from what you are accustomed to doing. After all, you have all seen (or maybe been) the officer who blew the red light at the speed of sound while running code. You are also in the business of getting somewhere quickly to help our fellow officers or citizens so stopping completely at red lights and slowing down for green lights may seem a little odd.

Regardless of that, consider the importance of this information. For the last 12 years, vehicle related incidents have been the leading cause of death for your profession. As it stands today, the profession is on our way to year 13. It is time for a little bit of radical behavior, and if your co-worker looks at you crazy because you crawled through an intersection like you were driving Miss Daisy, so be it. You have significantly improved your odds of going home that night.

