



FROM THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Winter Driving Requires Extra Precaution

By **Bill Krouse**, Professional Truck Driver, YRC Freight, America's Road Team Captain

For a truck driver in Minnesota, the winter months can spell days full of anxiety and uncertainty. Drivers here are mostly understanding of the patience it takes to operate a vehicle in snow and ice, but those bad conditions also mean people are more willing to make risky decisions to make up for lost time. There are a few key parts of the day where I see some unsafe behaviors and I'm sure my friends in the law enforcement community are aware of these too.

One of the main opportunities for all motorists, myself included, to focus our attention and improve our behavior is during side-of-the-highway activities. Whether it's a crash or an officer speaking to a motorist about a driving behavior, we need to all be aware of what's going on along the shoulder of the road. For truck drivers, the best thing an officer can do when addressing an accident or ticketing a motorist is to set up flares or emergency signs in visible places. Officers in Minnesota do a great job of this and it really helps. Since I'm in an elevated position in the cab of my truck, I can see any warning signs earlier than other vehicles, which allows me to move into the left lane so that other motorists can follow my lead and also see the emergency situation. Because I drive

thousands of miles a week, it's inevitable that I'll come up to an emergency situation and the earlier I can make informed decisions, the better off the people around me (in smaller vehicles) will be.

It's also important for the people around my truck to understand the limitations of trucks. When our trucks are fully loaded, it takes more than a football field plus both end zones to come to a complete stop. On the flip side, when our trailers are empty, they can be pushed around by the wind. These problems are especially bad during winter when icy or wet road conditions can reduce tire grip and make it even more difficult to stop. Trucks have long stopping distances. So, when cars cut in front of us, professional truck drivers like to slow down to build a cushion, knowing that we need extra space to stop. That's why as I'm touring the country spreading safety messages alongside other America's Road Team Captains, we emphasize the need for extra space. Drivers shouldn't be scared of us. After all, we're highly trained professionals; but they need to know that giving us extra space can make our jobs a lot easier.

We all have a responsibility to practice safe driving when out on the roads. This may

sound obvious, but one of the best ways to improve your safety is by being physically and mentally prepared to drive. Truck drivers know to keep their emotions out of their work and to focus fully on the task at hand. I think law enforcement officials understand that concept, too. In the winter, it's even more important to avoid distractions. We can make distractions less tempting by putting our phones out of reach, making sure our kids are buckled up and acting safely in the back seat, and planning our routes in advance. Simple things like leaving early and mapping out a low-traffic route can go a long way. And we can think further in advance than that. We can start taking care of essential car maintenance when the weather is still nice or pack emergency supplies in the trunk if we're going on long trips. All of this adds up and reduces risk, which is really important.

Trust me. By taking care of the things we can control, we eliminate chances to be distracted or take risks on the highway. Our families and neighbors count on truck drivers and law enforcement officers to be safe and responsible; and in the same vein, we rely on the motoring public to do the same. ■

