

Aggressive Driving and Road Rage

Aggressive driving has been a problem on our roadways for a while, and it seems to only be getting worse. Incidents of screaming, rude gestures, and sometimes even violence are reported frequently on our roadways to the point where it has earned its own name: road rage. Learn what causes road rage, whether you are prone to it, and how you can help to keep our roads safe by not giving in to road rage.

Definition of Road Rage

The term Road Rage was coined by news station KTLA in Los Angeles after a string of shootings occurred on several freeways in the city. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) defines road rage as when a driver "commits moving traffic offenses so as to endanger other persons or property; an assault with a motor vehicle or other dangerous weapon by the operator or passenger of one motor vehicle on the operator or passengers of another motor vehicle."

The NHTSA makes a clear distinction between road rage and aggressive driving, where the former is a criminal charge and the latter a traffic offense. This definition places the blame on the driver.

Road Rage Quiz

You may like to think that road rage is something that happens only to other people, but the truth is many of us are guilty of aggressive behavior on the road. Ask yourself these questions and answer honestly:

- Do you regularly drive over the speed limit, or try to "beat" red lights because you are in a hurry?
- Do you tailgate or flash your headlights at a driver in front of you whom you believe is driving too slowly?
- Do you honk the horn often?
- Do you ever use obscene gestures or otherwise communicate angrily at another driver?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, it is possible you are susceptible to road rage. Many times when a road rage incident occurs it is because the person was under stress in other areas of their life. The addition of congested traffic can add to stress, which then explodes when it is perceived someone else on the road has acted in an aggressive way, whether intentional or not.

Do You Cause Road Rage?

Even if you answered no to the questions above, are you sure you aren't causing others to lash out with road rage? Ask yourself these questions as well:

- Do you frequently use your phone while driving, or otherwise drive while distracted?
- Do you keep your high beams on, regardless of oncoming traffic?
- Do you switch lanes or make turns without using your turn signal?

- Do you fail to check your blind spot before switching lanes to make sure you aren't cutting someone off?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be contributing to causing road rage in others. While a violent reaction to switching lanes without a turn signal isn't warranted, it's best not to put yourself in that situation to begin with by always being aware of other drivers and driving cautiously.

Road Rage Statistics

The following statistics compiled from the NHTSA and the Auto Vantage auto club show that aggressive driving and road rage are causing serious problems on our roads.

- 66% of traffic fatalities are caused by aggressive driving.
- 37% of aggressive driving incidents involve a firearm.
- Males under the age of 19 are the most likely to exhibit road rage.
- Half of drivers who are on the receiving end of an aggressive behavior, such as horn honking, a rude gesture, or tailgating admit to responding with aggressive behavior themselves.
- Over a seven year period, 218 murders and 12,610 injuries were attributed to road rage.

One scary statistic worth noting is:

- 2% of drivers admit to trying to run an aggressor off the road!

How to Handle Road Rage

If you find that you have agitated another driver, whether the fault is truly yours or not, do not react or retaliate to the other driver on the road. This will only cause the situation to escalate. Remind yourself that the other driver is just bad at handling stress, avoid eye contact and continue to practice safe driving habits.

Unfortunately, it does not look like this problem is going away any time soon. All you can do is be a considerate, aware driver who follows the rules of the road. While it may be difficult in the heat of the moment, do not give in to feelings of anger or rage on the road. Think twice before you honk the horn or flip that finger, because you never know what may set off the people in the cars around you. Getting home safely is more important than teaching someone a dangerous lesson.

Source: American Safety Council