

DID YOU KNOW???

TURN SIGNALS – WHY DON'T DRIVERS USE THEM?

If you're a regular reader of these weekly articles, you have read numerous times about using your turn signal – every time, all the time! A great article in the New York Times last month by Norman Meyersohn on this subject was near and dear to my heart. He points out that around the poker table, the last thing you want is to let anyone know how you'll play your hand. On the road, it's just the opposite – everyone around you should get fair warning of your intentions. If only drivers followed that practice rigorously.

Last year, the NY State Police issued 15,127 tickets for violations of the state's section 1163 law, including failure to signal, not signaling at least 100 feet before making a turn or a lane change, or misusing a signal. In addition to a fine and surcharge, it is also two points on your driver's license.

Professional drivers who navigate 18-wheelers on the highway regularly cite the lack of turn-signal discipline as a major pet peeve.

Flicking the turn signal up or down is the simplest thing you can do as a driver. To not signal is just so inconsiderate that it defies reason. The few seconds of advance notice of an impending maneuver that a turn signal gives other drivers are often enough to avoid dangerous situations.

So why don't many drivers take this simple safety precaution? When asked about their bad habits in a national study, their explanations were confounding. For instance, 42 percent of drivers claimed they didn't have enough time to signal before turning. Nearly a quarter of drivers blamed laziness, while 17 percent said they skipped signaling because they were apt to forget to cancel the blinkers.

Worth noting: Men admitted that they were more likely, by 62 percent to 53 percent, to change lanes without signaling.

Of interest, I have observed that a significant percentage of local drivers do not signal a lane change. Signaling a lane change is required every time, even when you enter a center turn lane or move from a through lane into a left turn only lane.

Another common error by local drivers is to wait until the traffic light changes to green, then turn on the signal. Traffic law mandates signaling at least 100 feet before the turn, meaning 100 feet BEFORE the intersection or driveway, not when you get to it.

According to Chris Kaufmann, a former Los Angeles Metro police officer now a driving school instructor who specializes in teaching people who drive V.I.Ps, there is evidence that the act of signaling provides a cognitive benefit to the driver. "When you turn on the turn signal, you turn on your brain," said Kaufmann. "It's the start of a checklist to look left, look right, signal, look left, look right," he said.

When you consciously turn on your turn signal, not only do the blinking lights alert other drivers, but the touch on the turn signal stalk also tells the driver to prepare for the unexpected – for example, a car suddenly squeezing into the gap where you planned to merge.

So, how are you at signaling? Is it always, sometimes, or never? Make it always!