

Police warn: Respect large vehicles

◆ **More danger on the road:** The number of fatal car crashes in New Hampshire is on the rise.

By **KIMBERLY HOUGHTON**
Union Leader Correspondent

NASHUA — Local and state police are taking the opportunity to remind motorists how to drive safely around commercial vehicles and tractor trailers.

As part of Operation Safe Commute, a statewide law enforcement effort to combat distracted driving, police officials are warning drivers about the dangers of driving too closely to large trucks.

Fatal car crashes in New Hampshire are on the rise, according to Robert J. Sculley



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Peter M. Thomson, coordinator of the New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency, launches Operation Safe Commute Tuesday with a fleet of state and local patrolmen supporting his efforts.

of the New Hampshire Motor Transport Association. Along with impairment and distractions, motorists do not know how to properly drive around trucks, which can be a deadly combination, he said.

"Large trucks have blind spots. If a driver of a car or van cannot see the truck driver's side mirrors, the truck driver cannot see the other vehicle," Sculley said. "Trucks do not maneuver as easily as other, smaller vehicles." He warned

that trucks can't stop quickly, and that it is important for drivers to share the road with vehicles of all sizes.

America's trucking industry has been a leading proponent of safe driving and employs the most highly trained and skilled drivers on the road, according to Sculley. In order to gain a commercial vehicle license, truck drivers are held to a very high standard and must meet or exceed strict qualifications and pass a rig-

orous skills test, he said.

More than 80 percent of crashes that occur on the highway are caused by a passing vehicle, according to Sgt. John Begin of the New Hampshire State Police Commercial Vehicle Enforcement.

Large trucks have three blind spots, explained Begin, adding that those spots are located directly behind the vehicle, on the left side of the driver's front door and on the right side near the front tire of the tractor.

Begin said drivers should not follow too closely to a commercial vehicle and should always remain a few car lengths away. In addition, upon passing a large truck, it is best to be decisive and pass as quickly as possible, spending little time in the passing lane.

Begin also stressed that it is important to not cut in front of a tractor trailer after passing it, and to make sure that the truck is fully visible in the rear view mirror before moving in front. He noted that when stopping at a traffic light, it is crucial to leave enough space between the trailer in front and the vehicle behind. The traffic light should be fully visible to the smaller rear vehicle, and the rear vehicle's driver should be able to see the face of the truck driver in the truck's side mirror.

It is appropriate to abide by the three-second rule while traveling on highways, Begin said, explaining three seconds should exist between all vehicles. Motorists should also remember that it takes a trailer traveling at 65 mph about the length of a football field to come to a complete stop.

Distracted drivers, beware!

◆ **Wake-up call:** Police launch Operation Safe Commute on Friday.

By **KIMBERLY HOUGHTON**
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NASHUA — Law enforcement from every corner of the state will saturate highways and rural streets on Friday as part of a statewide effort to combat distracted driving and make roads safer.

Operation Safe Commute, launched by state and local police on Tuesday, is a public awareness campaign designed

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to enforce safe driving techniques and to discourage drivers from multitasking while behind the wheel. (See related story, Page A2.)

“Recent crash data has shone a light on the tragic consequences of impaired and distracted driving,” said Col. Robert L. Quinn of the New Hampshire State Police. Distracted driving has become the number-one cause of non-fatal accidents in the state, according to Quinn. Impaired driving remains the number-one contributing factor in accidents that result in death, he said.

Signs will soon be posted throughout the state encouraging residents to “Commute With Care,” a campaign designed to remind drivers about the dangers of texting while

driving, eating behind the wheel, applying makeup, talking on the phone or changing the radio station.

Quinn said some over-confident drivers have essentially converted their cars into mobile offices.

Peter M. Thomson, coordinator of the New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency, said he often witnesses drivers reading the newspaper or a book.

“Distracted driving is a huge problem,” Thomson said, explaining 110 people died in motor vehicle accidents in New Hampshire last year. So far this year, 117 people have died on state roadways, he said.

Drivers are also making unsafe lane changes, following vehicles too closely, ignoring the Move Over Law, failing to

use directional signals and not slowing down in construction zones, according to Thomson.

Police departments throughout the state, along with the New Hampshire State Police and the county sheriffs, are joining together to initiate Operation Safe Commute. Once a month, officers will hit the roads issuing warnings and citations. The main objective is to educate the public, state officials said.

Robert J. Sculley of the New Hampshire Motor Transport Association called distracted driving “a scourge.”

“We all have to work together to promote safe driving and reduce the number of fatalities due to distracted drivers who think they can safely multi-task while driving,” said Sculley.

About two dozen police officers from across the state stood in the rain to promote Operation Safe Commute Tuesday at the Nashua Welcome Center. Friday, some of those same officers will hit the streets for the campaign.

Police will also be visiting construction zones to enforce safe driving.

“Staying alert is especially important when entering a construction work zone on the highways and byways,” said Gary Abbott, executive vice president of the Associated General Contractors of New Hampshire.

Drivers who fail to follow the rules and are distracted pose serious threats to themselves, other drivers and construction workers, he said.

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