

The Importance of Practicing Defensive Driving on Jamaican Roads

What is Defensive driving?

The general definition of Defensive Driving is, driving in a manner which saves lives, time and money, regardless of the prevailing driving conditions and the actions of other road users. It means also, driving in a manner which avoids crashes.

Difference between an Accident and a Crash or Collision:

There is a fundamental difference between an accident and a crash or collision. An accident is an unfortunate event resulting from unavoidable causes, the key phrase being, "unavoidable causes". A crash is also an unfortunate incident, but one which can usually be avoided, by one or more of the drivers involved. In discussing defensive driving, we use the word collision/crash rather than "accident".

History - National Safety Council's Defensive Driving Course:

The National Safety Council (NSC) Defensive Driving Programme had its origin in the USA in 1964, with the aim of advocating the best practices in driver safety. Since its inception, this driver safety training programme has continued to evolve in equipping drivers with the skills, techniques and attitudes necessary to be safe drivers. The course has continued to improve, and remains relevant, despite the changes in the driving environments, vehicles and drivers. At the time of its establishment in the 1960's, the NSC was training a few hundreds in the USA. Today approximately 9,000 instructors across the globe, and approximately 3,000,000 drivers are trained annually, using the NSC Defensive Driving Course..

Impact of Defensive Driving Course:



In the USA, more states and courts have embraced NSC defensive driving course curriculum for insurance premium discounts, traffic ticket dismissal, corporate training, and driver training, more than they have any other driver improvement or defensive driving programme. All things considered, the defensive driving programme has made a significant difference in safety on roads across the globe.

In Jamaica, the NSC defensive driving course is used in many companies as a platform for helping to reduce crashes and, ultimately, maintenance costs. Consequently, motor vehicle insurance costs are minimized, and **the company's image is improved**. The Noranda Bauxite Partners, JAMALCO Bauxite and PETROJAM are

three (3) large organizations that have been using the NSC defensive driving course as a prerequisite for professional driving duties. These entities, along with many other local organizations, have been reaping tremendous benefits as a result of their involvement with this defensive driving programme.

How Defensive Driving Work:

Defensive Driving emphasizes that the driver has ultimate responsibility in helping to reduce traffic crashes, violations and fatalities, by choosing to drive more safely and defensively. The **CHOICE** to drive safely and responsibly becomes a habit when one deliberately commits to putting the defensive driving tools, tips and techniques, into practice. To drive defensively is a **Choice**; it is not easy; and it takes concerted effort.

A driver who has been trained in defensive driving techniques, drives in a manner that (a) protects all other drivers, and (b) does not pose a threat to others on the roads.

Road Safety

Costs of Collisions (Crashes):

The costs of collisions (crashes) to society and companies, are many and varied. What are some of these costs? They are:

- **Upfront Costs** - Health Care, Insurance, Emergency Services, Loss of Cargo, and Property Damage.
- **Hidden Costs** - Time, Customer dissatisfaction, Bad publicity, Vehicle rental and travel delays.

The personal costs resulting from a crash can also be very significant for the driver. These costs may be: Lost wages, Disability, Liability, Job loss, Personal/emotional issues, Stress and strain, Lifelong pain, Guilt and regret, Post-traumatic stress disorder, Public exposure, Relationship problems.

What does it mean to Drive Defensively?

According to the National Safety Council, defensive driving habits are:

- Making safe and legal driving decisions.
- Creating a safe, stress-free personal driving space in and around your vehicle.
- Driving to your destination safely – without a ticket or a crash, and without affecting any other driver's safety.
- Practicing common sense, courtesy, and cooperation.
- Recognizing the risks of hazardous driving behaviours and conditions.
- Accepting the moral responsibility as a professional driver, to protect the motoring public.

Young (Teen) Drivers and Defensive Driving:

In the USA, it has been proven that early exposure to defensive driving principles and techniques, has helped to reduce the number of crashes, hence injuries and fatalities for drivers aged 16 to 21 years, are fewer. Grennell's Driving School, a public training centre for National Safety Council, has employed these same defensive driving principles, techniques and training methods, to train teens and young learner driving students, and has received rave reviews and commendations from students, parents and companies on the effectiveness of its driver training programme.

Said one mother, Ms. Winsome O'Sullivan, "I'm grateful that my three daughters benefitted from your excellent service. Thanks to you and your well trained

staff, I am confident that they are well equipped to drive in Jamaica and the United States", Also, Ms. Alicia Robinson, a young teacher of St. Andrew High School said, " I had the privileged opportunity to work with three excellent instructors from Grennell's. I have no regrets, and I would recommend anyone to learn with them; got my license the first time!!" These remarks represent excellent testimonials from persons who have benefitted from the programme.

Role of Parents:

Parents have a role to play in how safely their children will drive. Children, for the most part, imitate the way their parents drive. Therefore, parents must display the defensive driving characteristics they wish to see their children adopt. Parents should always remember that, for children, 'things are caught, more than how they are taught'. They also need to be good 'Road Models' for their teens and young drivers.

The teen/young driver is more likely to be involved in a crash during his/her first year of driving. However, this risk can be significantly reduced, with special focus on the following defensive driving guidelines:

- Monitor the number of passengers younger than 21 years of age, in the vehicle, while the young person is driving. The risk of a crash exponentially increases, as the number of passengers, younger than 21 years of age, in the vehicle increases.
- Gradually phase in complete independent driving.
- Carefully screen young drivers' friends; this will help to reduce the risk of drunken driving, etc.
- Place a limit on night driving and speed at which they are permitted to drive. A breach in the limits/guidelines should carry some consequences or loss of driving privileges.
- Ensure that the young driver participates in, and satisfactorily completes, a defensive driving course.
- Ensure that the young driver is adequately trained before going for his/her driver's license.

Research Findings:

Research by the College of Lake County in the USA, shows that over a 10-year period after an incident, drivers who have not participated in **NSC DDC 8/6** (?) are: eight times more likely to be involved in a traffic collision than drivers who have taken the training. Untrained drivers are also ten times more likely to be arrested for a moving violation than trained drivers.

Road Safety

Drivers under age 21 were twice as likely to be cited for a moving violation, and almost six times as likely to be involved in one or more collisions, and one or more moving violations.

The research was based on a sample of three thousand (3000) drivers who had been involved in crashes or moving violations. The sample was randomly selected for the study.

In another research involving the South Carolina Chapter of the National Safety Council, **the DDC Alive at 25 programs, findings showed:**

- 35% decrease in fatalities statewide, involving young adult drivers ages (16-24) in 2007, compared to 2006 in South Carolina.
- 98% of participants in South Carolina said they would change their driving behaviors after taking the course.

As of December 2008, of the more than 10,000 young adults aged 15-24 who had taken the DDC program, not one has since been involved in a fatal collision in South Carolina.

Conclusions/Recommendations:

Based on the sustained, positive effect of defensive driving on trainees, (young and old), the following recommendations are being made:

1. All driver training institutes should use the principles and techniques of Defensive Driving Course (DDC) to train drivers.

2. The insurance companies of Jamaica should give discounts to participants who have satisfactorily completed the NSC, Defensive Driving Program.
3. Those drivers who have committed certain traffic offences should be mandated to participate in a DDC.
4. DDC should be used as an option to reduce or remove demerit points from the driver's license.
5. It should be mandated that, instead of suspending a driver's license for certain traffic offense, that driver should be required to complete a NSC, defensive driving course
6. All public passenger vehicle drivers should participate in a NSC Defensive Driving Course.
7. Drivers who wish to work in certain sensitive areas should be trained in defensive driving
8. Parents should ensure that their children be exposed to defensive driving from the outset of their learner driver training.
9. Certifying officers of the Island Traffic Authority should be trained in Defensive Driving.

It is evident from the above information, that if the NSC Defensive Driving techniques were taught and practiced in Jamaica, there would be fewer traffic crashes, hence reduced vehicular damages, traffic violations, injuries and road fatalities.

Government of Jamaica Road Safety Unit

The Road Safety Unit in the Ministry of Housing, Water, Transport and Works came about as a result of a Road Safety Project under-taken by the Government of Jamaica and the Government of Sweden. The project was carried-out by a grant of technical support from the Swedish Board for Investment and Technical Support (BITS) and made possible through consultancy services provided by the Swedish National Road Consultancy AB (SweRaod).

The objectives of the project was to conduct a study of the road safety needs in Jamaica, identify the structure, role and function of a Road Safety Unit (RSU) and to assist in the establishment of such a unit. The Road Safety Report was completed in December of 1993 and reviewed and accepted by the then Ministry of Construction and Works and approved by the Planning Institute of Jamaica. The establishment of the RSU, its purpose and structure was one of the recommendations of the report.

The Road Safety Unit (RSU) was later established with a director, in March of 1994 other persons were recruited gradually

The mission of the Road Safety Unit is to promote and foster an orderly and disciplined traffic culture that is conducive to the development of a safe traffic environment, through the conceptualisation, design and dissemination of a sustained programme of public information, education in schools, legislation, accident information and research.