

# DON'T

## *Follow Too Close*

*Your Guide to Preventing and Avoiding Rear-End Collisions*



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The author's purposes  
in publishing this book are as follows:

1. To propose a better RULE for judging the proper distance to follow the vehicle in front of you.
2. To try to convince you to adopt this RULE yourself.
3. To encourage you to get others to adopt the RULE.
4. To suggest appropriate actions to take when others are not following the RULE.

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## FOREWORD

I was born in 1931 and I have been driving since I was 15 years of age. For the last 54 years, I have been an injury lawyer, and I represent people who have been involved in automobile accidents. I can tell you that the most frequent accident is a rear-end collision and the most frequent injury is a “whiplash” neck injury.

This book may not be a pleasant read. You may feel that you are being told something that you already know (and you are). You don’t like being preached to (I don’t either), but do read on.

This book has been written expressly for you if you are a licensed (or unlicensed) driver, or if you ride in motor vehicles (in other words, EVERYBODY).



## FOLLOWING TOO CLOSE

If you are a driver I can state without fear of contradiction that at times (if not all the time) YOU (and every one of you) follow too close.

SAY IT AIN'T SO – YOU CAN'T!

I can't either and I'm the author of this book!



## THE RULE



The Rule is the foundation of this book. We will touch on many related topics, but the primary goal is to give each reader a single, simple touchstone that will always work for you, and may well save your life.

We have heard all of our lives that we shouldn't follow too close. What is “too close?” Well, we all know that if you get up right up behind somebody, that is too close. If you read the manuals for new drivers, you might see that you should be 10 feet or a car length back for every 10 miles per hour that you are traveling. Another version is that you should be two to four car lengths back. And you'll see other such rules, such as follow so many seconds behind, or increase your following distance appropriately depending on the weather conditions, or the size of your vehicle, etc.

These guidelines are not very helpful as they are not easily formed into habits. And I don't know anybody that I ever heard talk to about this subject say that they go by such a rule. The **BRICK WALL** rule becomes a good driving habit:

You should be far enough  
behind the car in front of you  
so that if that if that car suddenly turned into a  
**BRICK WALL,**  
you could stop before you hit it.

But cars do not turn into brick walls – why should you be that far back? Well, they may not turn into brick walls, but they can stop very quickly, and you never know what the driver in front of you is going to do. Sometimes a driver brakes suddenly for something that you don't see, like a deer crossing the road or a child on the side of the road that the

driver feels might run out into traffic. And if someone were to hit the car in front of you head-on, the car would, indeed, come to a sudden stop.

An unusual case in the newspaper recently involved three teenagers who were in a car following a large truck. The truck came to an underpass that was lower than the height of the truck and became stuck – it essentially turned into a **BRICK WALL**. The three teenagers following the truck too close were killed instantly when their car rear-ended the stuck truck.





Every few weeks, you will read in the paper about a chain accident, frequently in California, where as many as 100 motor



vehicles pile into the back of each other – every one of them following too close.



A recent news report in Florida described a wreck where 120 vehicles smashed into the back of each other. A patch of fog on the road was blamed for the accident. But the real cause of the accident was 120 cars following too close.

## Chapter 2: FTC is a bad habit – just like smoking

A passenger in a car that is following too close is like a person forced by circumstance to breathe second hand smoke. You hate to criticize the driver, but you don't like the idea of being unnecessarily exposed to danger.



Because it is a habit, it can be difficult to get out of the pattern of following too close. Many people who follow too close also tend to brake at the very last second when coming to a stop sign or stoplight. This is a dangerous combination of habits that, although it may be difficult, can be stopped.



Keeping safety in mind is essential for making positive changes in your driving habits.

At first, it may seem that you have to remind yourself every time you're in the car to maintain a longer distance behind other vehicles. The more space between the cars, the more time you have to react to a **BRICK WALL** scenario.

After some time you will notice yourself automatically allowing for more room in front of your car because it's EASY to do. It makes driving less risky, and less stressful.

If you drive very much – and most of us drive or are driven somewhere every day – you will almost certainly be involved in one or more rear-end collisions during the course of your life. These situations can easily be avoided if all drivers follow the **BRICK WALL** rule and change their driving habits accordingly.

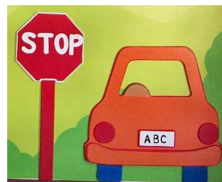


## Chapter 3 – FTC and other rules of the road.

### CONSIDER:

There are a number of rules of the road that we all regularly obey and follow without thinking about it because following these Rules is absolutely necessary and has become a habit. These rules include:

1. Drive on the right side of the road.



2. Stop for red lights and stop signs.

There are other Rules that are regularly broken by all motorists such as “speeding” restrictions. Traffic on interstates regularly moves at 10 to 15 miles above the posted speed limit. Nevertheless we all know that the greater the speed, the greater the danger.



**DRIVE NOW  
TALK LATER**

Then there are the Rules that we know are good rules – but sometimes they are knowingly broken endangering the driver, his passengers, and other motorists. These include driving under the influence and the new ones: driving while talking on the cell

phone, driving while texting, or while operating a GPS device.

All of these rules exist to make driving safer. We know how terrible the consequences can be when a driver runs a red light -- often causing a



severe collision, resulting in a ticket, or both. High speeds are also often mentioned as a contributing factor in a serious wreck, and drivers distracted by cell phones are now getting a lot of attention in reports of collisions.

It is not very common to see "following too close" listed as causing a collision. More often it is "failure to reduce speed" that is the reason stated in an accident report as the main cause of rear end accidents. But if you follow the **BRICK WALL RULE** you will have enough time to slow down and avoid a wreck.

So, there you have it – we all have this bad habit of following too close (or closely, if you like). Consider the damage that it does:

1. Over half of all wrecks are caused by following too close.
2. Totally unnecessary and numerous deaths and injuries are caused by simply following too close.
3. Neck injuries virtually unknown in earlier times are commonplace today – in fact the word “WHIPLASH” describes a neck injury caused by – you got it – following too close.

The image shows a South Carolina State Highway Patrol Uniform Traffic Ticket. The form is filled out with various details including the driver's name, license number, vehicle information, and location. A prominent stamp at the bottom right of the form reads "P 441914" and "ENFORCEMENT RECORDS COPY".

4. Even a minor rear-end collision can be a major problem to a family resulting in loss of use of a vehicle, property damage, medical expenses, loss of income, and an increase in insurance rates.





## Chapter 4 – Why do cars have bumpers (and horseless carriages didn't)?



The auto industry has an economic interest in your continuing your bad driving habit. Cars that are wrecked need to be replaced and that is good for the economy! The earliest cars and all since (without exception) come equipped with front and rear bumpers (so you can give as well as receive, I suppose). No car manual advises against or even mentions “following too close”. Cars contain no devices to help keep you from following too close, but they contain seat belts, head rests, air bags, and numerous other expensive refinements to protect you AFTER you have had your rear-end collision.



Early cars were modeled after horse-drawn carriages – in fact they were known as “horseless carriages”, and engine power then and now is measured in “horsepower”. But why is it that horse-drawn carriages had no bumpers? Could it be that horses had too much sense to run into the back of each other? Is this where the expression “horse sense” came from?

Surely we humans have enough sense to avoid driving one vehicle straight into the back of another. However, many drivers aren't giving their full attention to the road, or they might assume that the *other* driver will be careful enough to avoid a collision. While we're driving around in big metal cars, it can make us feel like we're inside a bubble of safety -- that our cars will protect us, so we can drive more aggressively than if we were riding, say, a bicycle. Instead of putting the responsibility on other drivers, we all need to realize how powerful that car is, and that it can become a dangerous weapon once it collides with another vehicle.

## Chapter 5 – Who Profits?

### WHO ELSE PROFITS FROM OUR BAD DRIVING HABIT?

Lawyers, chiropractors, physical therapists doctors, hospitals, body shops, insurance companies, car dealers, ambulances, funeral homes, cemeteries, etc., and all people working at these places. And of course the companies and people that support these enterprises. And last but not least

are the governments, Federal,

State, and local that collect taxes

on these activities.



IS IT ANY WONDER THAT .....

There is no hue and cry throughout the land to bring an end to following too close. Little is said about it by anybody except the injured, and they have no collective power or real incentive to try to break the drivers' habit. There is no organization like "MOTHERS AGAINST TAILGATERS". Only some driver manuals talk about the dangers of following too close, but that is about it.

SO IT APPEARS THAT LIKE DEATH AND TAXES, THE PRACTICE OF FOLLOWING TOO CLOSE WILL ALWAYS BE HERE.



## Chapter 6 – What NOT to do when you are being FTC'd

### **DON'T:**

1. **Tap your brakes.**
2. **Wave at the driver or give any signal that you are displeased with his driving. Definitely don't make any rude gestures, and don't mouth insults.**

The reason for these rules is that you don't know what kind of person is driving the vehicle behind you – except that he has already shown dangerous, incompetent, and



perhaps even aggressive driving behavior. You don't want to light the fuse that sets off "road rage".

It's irritating to be followed too closely. Not only is this other driver putting you in danger, it may feel that he is insulting you with his impatience. But never let your temper take over. And that is easy to do, from where you are sitting in what feels like the relative safety of your vehicle. That sense of invulnerability can prompt rash action. But the other driver may feel that same sense of invulnerability, and respond with extreme actions.

Consider the unknown dangers of the situation you are facing. This driver could:

- Be impaired by alcohol or other drugs.
- Have anger management issues or mental problems.
- Have weapons – even firearms – in his vehicle.
- Even be a criminal with a history of violence.



The driver could be just having a bad day and looking to take his frustrations out on somebody. Even normal people can act irrationally when upset or angry. Remind yourself: This isn't personal. To the driver behind you, you are just an anonymous person in another car.

Let me tell you a story. A few years ago, I was meeting a friend for lunch. To my surprise, when he arrived he had a badly swollen black eye. Of course I asked him what had happened.

The day before, he said, he was driving home from work and was being followed very closely by man driving a pickup truck. As far as my friend knew, the only indication he

had given that he was bothered by the FTC'er, was glaring at the driver for a few seconds in the rear-view mirror. But when both vehicles stopped at the next traffic light, the driver of the truck jumped out, ran to my friend's car, and punched him through the open window!

The violence didn't escalate, fortunately, and the driver of the truck was prosecuted. He testified in court that he attacked my friend because he had felt insulted. All because he didn't like the way someone had looked at him.

There are crazy people out there. One of them might be right behind you.



# Chapter 7 – What to do when you are being FTC'd

## **DO:**

1. **If possible, change lanes to let the FTC'er by.**

This is normal driving etiquette, especially if you are driving slowly. Even if the other driver is speeding, it's a good idea to move over. You can't control his dangerous behavior, but you can take steps to ensure your own safety.



2. **Pull off the road if practical.**

It's worth a minute or so to stop and get a tailgating driver off your bumper. And if there are several cars behind you, you definitely don't want to risk a pile-up.



**3. Speeding up may be an option – but be careful with this one.**

If you feel you are being put in a dangerous situation by an FTC'er, you might want to pull away from him a bit. But this is only effective for a very short while. Your goal is to get out of the driver's way, whether by changing lanes on a multilane highway, or pulling over and allowing him to pass when you reach a passing zone, or by pulling off the road in a safe place.

**4. If all else fails, turn on your emergency blinkers.** Drivers seldom use them and it is generally recognized that there is a problem in your car.

## Chapter 8 – What to do to prevent your son or daughter from becoming an FTC'er

As we have observed, FTCing is a habit just like smoking and the best way to break a habit is to never get the habit to start with. People tend to learn by following someone else's example as opposed to taking instructions. Your child will most probably have ridden with you for thousands of miles before reaching driving age. Hopefully they will have observed your driving habits and that you did not follow cars too close.

Along this line, I have always had a problem with trying to explain to a child why it is alright to exceed the posted speed limit. Do you tell the child that the sign doesn't mean anything, or that it is alright to break this law, but not others? Isn't it really best to set a good example by driving the speed limit? (We won't dwell on this any longer.)

When my son Pierce was learning to drive, I came up with a good idea to instill in him the principle of not following too close. We were returning from a vacation to the Outer Banks of North Carolina, and my son just gotten his learner's permit. I let him drive the 300 mile route under the following conditions:

- I gave him \$100.



- Every time he began following too close, he lost theory, he could have wound up owing me



\$5. (In money.)

- If a car pulled in front of him, he had 10 seconds to correct his distance and not be following too close.



It was a fun game, and it got his full attention. Best of all, it worked - he's never rear-ended anyone.

Finally, on the day your teenager gets a learner's permit, give your son or daughter a copy of this book. That day marks an important rite of passage for a young person. Anything you can do to make it memorable will reinforce the idea that you are concerned about their safety.

## Chapter 9 – What to do when your spouse is an FTC'er

A spouse who is an FTCer presents special problems. Handling husband and wife conflicts, however, is well beyond the scope of this book.

Having said that, here are some thoughts:

On a “good” day, while not in the car, relate to your spouse that you have read this book and confess to him or her that you have concluded that you are a bad FTCer.

However, you plan to do better and will always consider that the car in front of you might turn into a **BRICK WALL**. Tell your



spouse to please correct you while you are driving if he or she thinks you are following too close, and that you owe it him or her, and to your children, not to be an FTCer.

Hopefully he or she will get the message and will want to participate in the program with you.

If talking about it doesn't do any good, you might insist on doing all of the driving, not riding with your spouse, taking the other car or just not going. This is much stronger

medicine, but maybe it will get the job done. You might consider getting someone else to talk to him or her, or maybe take a drivers' course together. And - you guessed it - be sure to give him or her a copy of this book!

**GOOD LUCK!!!**



## Chapter 10 – Snow and Rain – Don't FTC in bad weather

Snow, rain and sleet always make driving conditions more dangerous. They increase the time needed to slow down or come to a stop, and obstruct the driver's vision, sometimes to just a few yards. In these



situations, it is even more important to maintain a safe distance while driving and follow the **BRICK WALL** rule.

Keep in mind the condition of your brakes and tires; other vehicles may not be equipped with high quality or well taken care of parts, and they may not be able to react as quickly as your vehicle can. Even more importantly, *you may not be able to react as quickly as you think you can.*

If your child calls you from home while you're driving in the middle of a storm, suddenly you are distracted *and* driving through a hazardous downpour - your chances of getting in

an accident are substantially higher than usual. If you are also in the habit of following too close, there are three factors working against you that can have devastating results.



During the winter months, roads are often icy from sleet, snow or freezing rain. Patches of "black ice" are common causes of wrecks during the cold season, and are undetectable to motorists. Even when ice is clearly visible on the roadway, many drivers don't take the precautions of slowing down and allowing more room in front of and behind their vehicles. In these conditions it is essential that you follow the **BRICK WALL** rule to ensure that you are prepared to stop for anything.



## Chapter 11 – FTC and the Law

In North Carolina, as in all other states, there is a North Carolina law against following too close, which reads as follows:

### **G.S.§ 20-152. Following too closely**

a)The driver of a motor vehicle shall not follow another vehicle more closely than is reasonable and prudent, having due regard for the speed of such vehicles and the traffic upon and the condition of the highway.

You will note that the statute does not attempt to say what is “reasonable and prudent”.

As we have said many times in this book, we think **the RULE is that you must be able to stop if the car in front of you turns into a BRICK WALL** (of course, this means that you must be able to stop if the car in front of you comes to a sudden, unexpected stop).

The following too close law has a second section which is not widely known or talked about, which is as follows:

b) The driver of any motor vehicle traveling upon a highway outside of a business or residential district and following another motor vehicle shall, whenever conditions permit, leave sufficient space so that an overtaking vehicle may enter

and occupy such space without danger, except that this shall not prevent a motor vehicle from overtaking and passing another motor vehicle. This provision shall not apply to funeral processions.

The above section sets forth an entirely different reason for not following too close. It is to require you to allow and assist the car behind you to pass you safely. This section suggests that an addendum be made to our **BRICK WALL RULE** to read as follows:

## **BRICK WALL RULE**

with

## **PASSING ADDENDUM**