



10 MINUTE TRAINING TOPIC

Roadway Debris

July | 2021

Roadway Debris

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Statistics

- More than 200,000 crashes involved debris on U.S. roadways during the past four years, according to a new study released by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.
- Road debris has resulted in approximately 39,000 injuries & more than 500 deaths between 2011 and 2014.
- Nearly 37 percent of all deaths in road debris crashes resulted from the driver swerving to avoid hitting an object.
- Overcorrecting at the last minute to avoid debris can increase a driver's risk of losing control of their vehicle and make a bad situation worse.
- More than one in three crashes involving debris occur between 10:00 a.m. and 3:59 p.m., a time when many people are on the road hauling or moving heavy items like furniture or construction equipment.
- Debris related crashes are much more likely to occur on Interstate highways. Driving at high speeds increases the risk for vehicle parts to become detached or cargo to fall onto the roadway.

Defined

- Road debris, a form of road hazard, is debris on or off a road. Road debris includes substances, materials, and objects that are foreign to the normal roadway environment. Debris may be produced by vehicular or non-vehicular sources, but in all cases, it is considered litter, a form of solid waste.
- When cargo or a vehicle part dislodges from a moving vehicle and falls onto the road, it becomes a serious hazard for road users.
- Even a small item may be dangerous when it is discharged at highway speed prompting erratic avoidance maneuvers, and causing a crash...



Types

Road debris can puncture tires, damage undercarriages, and cause your vehicle to skid or slide out of control. Look out for these common types of road debris:

- **Tires** – When the tire blows, pieces of it are left in the road, causing other drivers to swerve or merge to avoid running over the debris.
- **Car Parts** – Mufflers, bumpers, and hubcaps are often left in the road after an accident. Older vehicles may lose parts as they travel along the highway. Maintain a safe distance from vehicles that may lose a part while in motion.
- **Light Poles** – Light poles collapse into the street. They can create a very dangerous situation if power lines are also down.
- **Signs** – Traffic signs may fall into the road after a storm or car wreck. Signs often have sharp edges or bolts and screws that can puncture your tires.
- **Trees or Branches** – One of the most common types of road debris.
- **Construction Barrels** – Can very easily roll onto the road.
- **Metal Debris** – Sheet metal, furniture, appliances, and other metal debris, such as sharp steel, nails, screws, and other metal pieces.
- **Miscellaneous Trash** – Bags of food, diapers, garbage, even roadkill can cause problems.

Severity of crash

- Road debris often collects on roads that are not very busy:
 - In rural areas, debris can be found in the middle of road or around sharp turns and corners.
 - In larger cities with high traffic volume, road debris usually collects on the sides of the road or on medians and traffic islands.
 - Road debris can puncture tires, damage undercarriages, and cause your vehicle to skid or slide out of control .
- Sadly, crashes related to obstacles in the travel lane are often serious since the driver often swerves to avoid the object and either rolls-over their vehicle or heads into oncoming traffic.



How to avoid Road Hazards

- **Stay alert.** Be aware of your immediate surroundings. If you're in the suburbs, you're more likely to encounter family pets or small animals. On the highway, watch for blown tire treads and deer.
- **Plan ahead as you drive.** Think about where you could move your vehicle in an instant if you really had to swerve to avoid an object in the roadway.
- **Pay attention.** You're not daydreaming, are you? Whenever you drive, always keep your eyes and attention focused on the road ahead.
- **Keep a safe distance.** Resist the urge to tailgate or drive too close to vehicles in front of you. That way, you'll have plenty of room to stop if they slam on their brakes:
 - Be especially careful if you are following a pickup or semi with objects loaded on it.



Do your part

- Maintain your own vehicle. This will avoid debris to fall from your own vehicle. Blown tires, tire treads, drive shafts, bumpers, hoods, leaf springs, and brake parts have all contributed to serious crashes.
- Items improperly tied onto passenger vehicles, such as mattresses or furniture, also pose a threat to drivers since they can blow off the roof and land anywhere.
- Make sure to do your part in preventing collisions by securing your load and by notifying the authorities when you spot potential trouble on the highway.



Who is at fault

- A crash involving road debris is usually considered an at-fault collision.
 - Uninsured driver coverage usually doesn't apply here because it's debris, not a car, and as such would never have insurance coverage in the first place.
- If you swerve to miss debris laying on the ground but collide with another vehicle or a guardrail in the process, you're likely going to be the at-fault party.
- Braking to stop from hitting debris can also result in another driver rear-ending you. The person rear-ending you will likely bear the lion's share of the fault, and you'll likely be able to collect damages from them.
- If another driver caused the debris that caused you to swerve and crash, you'll have to prove the other driver's involvement with eyewitness statements, especially if the driver doesn't stop.

Summary

- Drivers have a much bigger responsibility when it comes to preventing debris on the roads than most realize.
- Currently every state has laws that make it illegal for items to fall from a vehicle while on the road.
- Drivers should practice defensive driving techniques while on the road to prevent debris related crashes from occurring.
- If you see you are unable to avoid debris on the roadway, safely reduce your speed as much as possible before making contact.
- Prevent collisions by securing loads and equipment for which you are responsible.
- Be prepared to maneuver in the event you have to swerve to avoid an object in the roadway.
- Watch out – road debris can become a road hazard with little or no warning.
- Notify the authorities when potential trouble is spotted on the highway.