

Left-Turn Accidents

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that left turns cause approximately 53% of cross-path crashes. They also report that 40% of the over 5.8 million police-reported vehicle crashes in the U.S. are intersection-related, and the majority of those occur while making a left turn.

The main factors that tend to drive these statistics include:

- Left turns disrupt the normal flow of traffic, especially if there isn't a left turn lane and traffic signal because the traffic is disrupted in both directions.
- Drivers must gauge the speed and the distance of any oncoming vehicles and then cross the opposing traffic lanes while also watching for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Because many drivers do not use their turn signals, other drivers don't know their intentions.

A key point to remember is the turn doesn't cause the accident; it's the driver making the turn. The main problem for a driver turning left against oncoming traffic is that they must do a lot of things simultaneously: First, they must see and yield to any oncoming traffic, which has the right of way. Next, they need to make sure that the area they are turning into is clear. At the same time, the driver must accurately determine how far away any oncoming traffic is traveling at, and at what speed. In many left turn accidents, the driver of the vehicle making the left turn misjudges the speed of the oncoming vehicle. Weather, sun glare and darkness impede a driver's ability to make these judgment calls. When this happens, the oncoming vehicle usually cannot stop in time and crashes into the right side of the left turning vehicle.

Who's at Fault?

The traffic laws in most states mandate that a vehicle making a left turn must wait until it can make the complete turn safely before it enters and moves through an area of oncoming vehicle traffic. In left turn accidents, fault is almost always established automatically because traffic laws tend to attach responsibility to the driver making a left turn to yield to traffic that is approaching and oncoming, and then to turn only when it is completely safe.

To be deemed legally responsible or at fault for an auto accident, a driver must have been either careless and/or found to be in violation of an applicable traffic law. Often the location of the damage on the vehicles involved in a car accident makes it easy for investigators to determine what each driver was doing prior to the collision. In most left turn accidents, the vehicle making the left turn has collision damage on the right side while the car that it turned in front of will have damage to the front and left side of the vehicle.

Other Considerations

In August 2016, the New York City Department of Transportation published a research study titled Don't Cut Corners: Left Turn Pedestrian and Bicycle Crash Study. This study concluded that left turns account for more than twice as many pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities as right turns and over three times as many serious injuries and fatalities.

The study also found that left turns are more dangerous than right turns for three main reasons:

1. Left turns can be taken at a wider radius, which leads to higher speeds and greater pedestrian exposure
2. The driver's visibility is partially obscured by parked cars and their vehicle's A-pillar
3. Left turns are more complicated than right turns, and require more mental and physical effort ("driver workload") than right turns.

Other key points in this study conclude that nearly 80% of the pedestrians and bicyclists killed or severely injured by a left-turning vehicle involve a passenger vehicle. Senior citizens are also more at risk. -the median age of the driver involved in these left turn accidents was 67. Slower reaction time, confusion and deteriorated eyesight are likely contributors to this.

Avoiding Left Turn Crashes

The best way for a driver to avoid a left turn accident is to avoid making left turns. Since this is not always practical, drivers must remain aware, patient, and cautious when making a left turn and never assume anything about what an oncoming vehicle will do. Common tips to reduce the chances of being involved in a left turn crash include:

- Obey the law, yield the right of way to other traffic
- Signal for a left-hand turn at least 150 feet in advance of the intersection or turning point
- Make sure there are no other vehicles, bicycles, motorcycles, or pedestrians in your path.
- Be ready to yield to anyone in the crosswalk who may decide to step out at the last minute
- Allow plenty of time to maneuver your vehicle from a stopped position across the traffic lanes.
- Don't cut the corner. Start turning when your vehicle's front wheels are in line with the center of the street you are entering.

Some companies take great steps to plan their routes to avoid as many left turns as possible. UPS is a prime example of one of these companies and they were even featured in a CNN news story. UPS began planning right-turning delivery loops in the 1970's. They now have a sophisticated software system that calculates the best route while avoiding left turns wherever possible. Though a reduction in



left turn crashes is likely evident for UPS, their primary objectives in implementing this procedure were fuel efficiency and time savings. By using their software route optimization software, UPS saves \$300 to \$400 million annually in fuel, wages and vehicle running costs as well as 185 million miles per year.

Not every company will be able to implement such a drastic approach, but even smaller companies can review their delivery routes, talk with their drivers and alter routes to avoid as many left turns as possible. There are many car dealerships that have taken the initiative to plan their vehicle test drive routes for both mechanics and customers to avoid left turns.

Additional information on drowsy driving recognition and prevention is available from the NHTSA (www.nhtsa.gov), the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (www.iihs.org) and other organizations or by contacting Everest's Loss Control Department at (800) 269-6660 or losscontrol@everestre.com

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