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PARKING LOTS: NAVIGATING THE ASPHALT JUNGLE

There is a lot of information about defensive driving while on roadways, but what about parking lots? These seemingly endless stretches of asphalt present their own set of hazards. Whether parking for work, on a quick shopping trip or dropping the kids off, extra precautions are needed to keep everyone safe.

- Be alert and slow down. Many parking lot collisions occur when vehicles cut across a parking area, often to avoid traffic signals on main roads. These drivers often exceed the posted lot limit. Collisions also occur at entrances to mall parking lots and on the mall's perimeter roads.
- Take care and look out for drivers who are so intent on finding the perfect parking place that they fail to pay attention to conditions around them. If you're looking for a space, park in the first available spot. Continually circling the parking lot for the closest spot only increases your frustration.
- Stay inside the lines. Parking spaces are marked with either perpendicular or angled lines. The greatest number of collisions occur when backing out of a parking space. If possible, back into your space so that when exiting you are pulling out into traffic. When you back out of a parking space, look over your shoulder (don't rely on your mirrors alone).
- Signal those turns. Using your turn signals to indicate which direction you are going is as essential in the parking lot as on the road. When two vehicles pull up to a space at the same time, common courtesy dictates that the vehicle on the same side as the spot has the right of way.
- Follow the rules of the lot. Parking lots are marked with speed limit, stop and directional arrow signs. These are in place for a reason. Be aware that many lots also use speed bumps to regulate the speed of automobiles.
- Be aware of the parking lot surface; report deteriorated conditions and any other hazards to the management. Uneven pavement or potholes can cause damage to vehicles as well as injuries to pedestrians.
- Parking ramps have some additional concerns. Always take your ticket with you. If a thief finds your automobile attractive, it will be more difficult for them to leave the ramp if the ticket isn't in the auto.
- When exiting a parking ramp, be on the lookout for any traffic entering the exit lane or ramp from other parking levels. Also, watch for indications that a vehicle is preparing



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to vacate a parking spot: brake lights, back-up lights, exhaust and driver body language.

- Park in a well-lit section of a lot or ramp, in an area that is not isolated. If possible, avoid shrubs, walls or signs; they can obstruct your vision when exiting and also provide potential hiding places for assailants.
- Secure any valuables in the trunk and activate any security devices. Make sure all doors are locked and windows are rolled up.
- If you are uncomfortable walking to your vehicle after dark or alone, don't hesitate to ask the lot management for an escort. Many lots and ramps provide escort services.
- Keeping children safe in parking areas requires clear instructions and vigilance.
 - Allow plenty of time to travel to your destination. Kids are often excited about the event and love to run. They often fail to look both ways for traffic. Reinforce the rules of properly crossing the street. These rules also apply to parking lots.
 - Look for a designated loading/unloading zone. If one is not present, find a less busy area in which to drop off the kids.

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