

3PointTurn – Episode 4: Stay at the Scene

FLHSMV:

You're listening to 3PointTurn, a driver safety podcast presented by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. In promotion of a safer Florida, FLHSMV offers this educational series as a supplemental resource to the Florida Driver License Handbook. For more information on the topics presented in this podcast, please visit FLHSMV.gov.

On this episode, the FLHSMV team talks about why drivers should stay at the scene of a crash or roadside breakdown and the repercussions a motorist faces when they don't.

Derek Perez:

Welcome to 3PointTurn. I'm your host, Derek Perez. I'm joined one last time by Captain Peter Bergstresser, a 24-year veteran of the Florida Highway Patrol and FHP's chief of public affairs. It'll be sad to see you go, Captain.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Likewise, Derek. It's been a pleasure.

Derek Perez:

We've covered a lot in our first three episodes – personal responsibility aspects of driving safety, last time we talked about how to arrive alive. For this episode, we're going to dig into an area which you have a lot of professional experience in, and that is traffic crashes.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely. That, and unfortunately, traffic homicides as well.

Derek Perez:

That can't be an easy job.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

No, not at all, not at all.

Derek Perez:

We don't want any of our listeners to experience that. Specifically, for this episode, we're going to discuss why you should stay at the scene of a crash. And we're going to do that by looking at wrecks and hit-and-run crashes. And then we'll segue that discussion into what to do when your car breaks down on the side of the road. Ready to do this?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Sure am, let's go.

Derek Perez:

Captain, getting in a crash while driving is almost an inevitability. How many would you estimate you've been involved in, in your lifetime?

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Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Personally, I've been involved in two minor crashes.

Derek Perez:

I bet you've investigated and observed several that maybe were not so minor.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely, quite a few I have. A lot of regular crashes because I worked Orlando where we had a lot of crashes where sometimes they were little fender benders, just minor damage. Some were minor injuries, but unfortunately quite a few, I think right around 50 or so that I personally investigated at were traffic homicide. So those are always tragic and they have lingering effects on families and that lasts for years and years and years, forever.

Derek Perez:

Sounds like a very serious deal. I know I've had a couple of thankfully minor crashes myself, but thankfully none where I was at fault. In that first podcast episode, we talked about how you as a driver can do everything correct, but you can never fully account for what happens with other motorists around you. Take a hypothetical, let's say you get in a crash. I'm not sure it matters whether you were at fault in the scenario or not, but how should you handle it?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, first off, when you get into a crash, the first thing you want to do is you want to make sure everybody's okay. You want to look around. If you have occupants in your car like passengers, friends, and as a new driver, young driver, definitely look around and make sure all your friends are fine. And then the next thing you want to do is evaluate what happened with the crash. Like where are you? Are you in the middle of the roadway? Look at the other driver, what are they doing? At that point you want to try to get your vehicles off the road safely, maybe communicate with the other driver if it's agreeable and say, "Hey, let's move over to the shoulder here", get it off the road into a parking lot. So at that point, we just call it, clearing the scene, and it's a law, you have to take your vehicles off. If they are stuck in the road, for some reason to say it was a too bad of a crash that your wheels are bent up and you can't move it, at that point you don't want to stay sitting in the vehicle, you want to go over to the sidewalk or what have you, and try to put the hazards on the vehicle, make it obviously people are going to be aware that there's a crash there.

So once that's done, the next thing you want to do is you want to call the police of course, call 911 and get the fire department out there. But mainly as a new driver, call 911, let them know what happened, where you're at. And then also as a new driver, you want to get a hold of your family. You want to get ahold of your mom or dad and you want to get ahold of a family friend or something if you have one and let them know what's going on as well.

Derek Perez:

That is good advice. Let me back up and just check each of those with a couple of questions I have for you. So the first thing you said was to make sure that everyone's okay, checking yourself and any passengers that may be with you. If everything's okay, great, but if they are hurt, you recommended calling 911 for emergency services?

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Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely. Because the thing about it with a crash is sometimes you don't, well let's say it's a bad crash, sometimes you have back injuries and you really don't want to move folks if they got really twisted up on it. So you want to keep them secure in the seat, keep their neck stabilized, don't have them move around. But if it's a minor crash, yeah, you're going to have aches and pains, but it's sometime better to get off of that roadway. Because what happens is, especially in busy areas like Orlando, it might be a main road. So if you sit there in the car and your dazed but you're just sitting there and you're okay, somebody else might run into you and then really hurt you. Or, and this just goes into evaluating your surroundings, when you get out of the vehicle, remember you're in the middle of the road. So there's other vehicles coming in and around you maybe swerving around you. So really be careful when you get out of that car, just don't jump out and say, "Okay, the world stopped because I got in a crash."

Derek Perez:

That is a good point because sometimes the adrenaline is pumping. You might not be a hundred percent sure what to do. And sometimes the instinct is to immediately jump out of your car. But as you pointed out, it can endanger you and it can endanger the other motorists on the road. Now, are there any other numbers to call besides 911 if it isn't necessarily an emergency?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well you can, and this is another one that if you're out on the interstate, let's say you try to 911, but then also you can call *FHP, which is *347. So you want to get ahold of them and then let know. And usually you're going to get tied to a call taker or dispatcher, and same thing, you want to let them know where you're at, what direction you're traveling, if you can. And this is something that with a new driver, they may not know what road they're on. So that's where if you have a smartphone, which most young people have it, look at your smartphone, and I'll just use Google as an example, go to Google Maps. It's going to tell you, and then you can kind of space the map out a little bit, find the closest cross section or cross street, I should say, that that you're located. So that way they can pinpoint you.

Derek Perez:

Well, that's excellent advice. So we're making sure everyone's okay, as well as yourself. We're evaluating our surroundings, as you said, to make sure we don't leap out into an even more dangerous situation. You'd mentioned clearing the scene. Now that is interesting to me because of course there's sometimes the mistaken impression that everything has to remain exactly right there so it can be evaluated by the officers involved or insurances involved. What is the actual advice on clearing that scene?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, the thing is, if you can clear the scene, by law you have to clear the screen, which means you have to move the vehicles off. And I'll give you two examples. One is that if it's a fatal crash, that usually takes a huge amount of trauma to the vehicles and whatnot to cause a fatal crash, and those type crashes you're usually not going to be able to move the vehicles anyway. They're either going to be in the road or they're going to be off in the shoulder, up on a tree or what have you. But in a minor crash, you should, most of the time be able to move those vehicles off into the parking lot or move them off onto the shoulder of the road. And way off on the shoulder, just don't go a little bit, go way off on the shoulder. Because what happens is the rest of the world's continuing to go along and they're going to

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speed by. Some may slow if it's a big crash scene, but most are just going to keep zipping along by it. So it's really, really important to get off the road and get the vehicles off the road if you can.

Derek Perez:

So if the car is able to be moved off the road, it should be onto the shoulder or into a bike lane completely off the side road or into a parking lot is a good option, yes?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely. The parking lot is the best option, really.

Derek Perez:

Then you can contact insurance companies, photograph what happened, share contact information for insurance purposes and of course, call law enforcement to report the crash.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely.

Derek Perez:

Well, it sounds like one of the most important things is to keep your head on a swivel, stay frosty, as we said before, and to make sure that you don't further endanger yourself or your fellow passengers or other motorists on the road. And an important side note is to make sure to probably not react aggressively. I mean, crashes are going to happen, right, sir?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yeah.

Derek Perez:

Yeah. If the person hit you or you've been hit becomes angry, you should probably avoid further confrontation. Can you speak to that de-escalation of the situation?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, the thing about it is this, and this is what I always tell people when I go to crashes, that nobody wanted to get into a crash. It's something that wasn't intended. So first off I tell them right off the bat, if it was a case where somebody actually wanted to hit you, it wouldn't be a crash. It's a battery, it's a battery with a deadly weapon, the vehicle. Now, whether or not somebody was aggressively driving or cutting you off, the way that the law is set up in the way the officers are trained, the troopers are trained, they're going to get to the bottom of it. And then just to speak on a little side point here, once you got the vehicles off the roadway, all right, if you see somebody standing around that's a witness, you want to get that witness's, name and number. So make sure you get that. And then that's what you can do, instead of getting mad and yelling at this other person and basically spinning your wheels, doing nothing, look for the witnesses around you that are going to take off, and say, "Hey, did you see this?" And they're going to say, "Yeah, I saw it." "Can I get your name and number to give to the officer or the trooper?" Because ultimately you're not going to win by just screaming at somebody on the side of the road, that's just, it's ridiculous.

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Derek Perez:

One hundred percent agree. And you know, I think it goes all the way back to podcast one where we say, "Treat other motorists, regardless of the situation, the way you'd want to be treated. Take a deep breath and handle the situation with calm and patience." Wonderful. Well, you've identified a lot of things that can happen if you get into a traffic crash. Hopefully our listeners are heeding that advice. After a quick break, we're going to talk about what happens if a driver freaks out and bypasses our first point altogether. You're listening to 3PointTurn.

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Derek Perez:

Welcome back to 3PointTurn. Captain Bergstresser and myself are going to turn our attention to hit-and-run crashes. Any opinions on that topic?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

I have quite a few on that. In Orlando we have quite a few hit-and-run crashes. So I have a couple of comments on that.

Derek Perez:

I imagine the first one is you should never do it.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yeah, don't do it.

Derek Perez:

Well, as we discuss this point, the primary emphasis is to, as I said, not leave a crash you may have been involved in. Why is that so important captain?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, first off, I just want to just set it up in this way. A hit-and-run crash is something that if you're a new driver, and we're just under the assumption that you're a law-abiding citizen, you have a license, you have insurance and you have registration that's good. In my experience, most hit-and-run drivers, this is what happens, usually they don't have a license is one part of it. Their car's not registered, that's another part. Second part is they don't have insurance. If it gets a little bit more involved in more criminal, they're DUI, which means they're driving under the influence. So they might be drunk or

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impaired with some type of drugs. And then lastly, they might have a warrant out for their arrest. So that would be a reason why you would flee the scene.

Now with our audience today, which is a younger driver, usually what happens is they get into a crash, the other person's yelling at them and they freak out. They run home because that's what they do. Now, if that happens, that technically could be leaving the scene because you leave the scene in that sense. But if they do that, because they either feel that their safety is at risk or what have you, at that point, once they get to their home and they get to their parent or their guardian, what have you, they're going to say, "Hey, I was just in a crash. It was at this street." They're going to immediately want to call 911 and they could do that on the way home, call 911. You need to contact the police and let them know, "Hey, look, I'm going down the street to my house", because most young drivers may not be that far from their home so they think it's okay just to go home.

That other driver, if they're calm and collected, at that point, no, you should stay at the scene. Say, "Look, can we move off to the side of the road? Let's call 911." Or have that person call 911, make sure it's done. But then immediately call your parent. Because in our previous segment, we were talking about getting in a crash. But when it's specific to hit-and-run, there's usually a reason why people leave the scene and that shouldn't be for young people. Now, if they're just scared because it wasn't their vehicle, it's going to make it much worse. So you want to stay at the scene even if you borrowed your friend's car from school, you immediately want to call 911, the police, call your family, call your parents, get everybody there. It's much better to do it all up front.

Derek Perez:

What I'm hearing is that even if you're terrified, do not flee the scene if you're scared. Because sometimes an inexperienced driver doesn't know what to do when they hit someone. And as long as all of their other preparations are in line, their license, their registration, there is no reason to flee the scene because even if you're driving a car that your parents told them not to drive the criminal punishment for leaving the scene can be far worse than just being grounded.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely.

Derek Perez:

Just because you're scared of what may happen, don't leave the scene of a crash. You're most likely making a bad thing much worse.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Much worse, much worse. And there's another point to this too, is that when you have a crash like this, and we talked about in the prior podcast, why would you move your cars off if you want to keep the scene intact so you can prove that you were innocent? Let's say you got rear-ended and the vehicle in front of you, you know, what have you. So at this point, the reason you want to keep the vehicles at the scene is that when the officer gets there, the trooper gets there, he can investigate the crash properly. And then he can maybe see marks in the roadway and see where you moved off the road. So it also helps the investigation.

It's not just that, stay at the scene because it's the law, it's also because the officer, the trooper that arrives there is going to be doing an investigation. He's going to be looking at physical details on the road. And yet, even though you may have moved it, maybe 10 feet off the road, he can still see a lot of

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things from that. He can match up your tires with some of the tread, some of the marks in the roadway. He can match up some of the debris from your vehicle, like your headlight might've cracked, or your taillight might have cracked. If you took the car home, it makes his job much harder. He can't sit there and do the investigation, he's got to wait for that car to get back to the scene and then say, "Okay, yeah, you definitely were at the scene." So there's a little bit more to it than just, "Don't flee because it's a law." It's also, if you weren't at fault in the crash, or if you wore or what have you, you want the officer or the trooper to do a good investigation by having both vehicles there.

Derek Perez:

Having that available to the trooper sounds like it's going to be the best result for everyone, even if there's a minor inconvenience for you or your family.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yes.

Derek Perez:

Now we said, it's not the only reason, but we should point out that it is in fact a crime, a hit-and-run is illegal.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yes.

Derek Perez:

If you're involved with a crash where you hit another driver, a pedestrian, a bicyclist, and even a pet, you're required, I'm given to understand, to stay at the scene. It does not signify criminal guilt by staying. But if you leave, you will be guilty of leaving the scene of a crash.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

That's absolutely correct.

Derek Perez:

So depending on the crash, the offense could be a misdemeanor or even a more serious infraction like a felony. Florida law tells people to stay at the scene when it involves a pet. But what about hitting something else like a deer or a large animal? How do you determine if an animal is even a pet?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, ultimately, and this is just my experience in Florida, people hit deer, sometimes they hit a bear and I've seen them hit other smaller animals, but mainly it's a deer or it's a bear is what's going to cause some damage to the car. At that point, ultimately, you want to pull over and you want to call the police. It's easy, everybody has a phone say, "Hey, look, I'm out here in the middle of nowhere." It's one in the morning, let's say it's in the middle of the night for whatever reason and say, "Hey, I just hit a deer." Usually it will immobilize the vehicle, meaning it'll just completely cause your radiator to go bye-bye and you're just sitting there with a car that's not going to run.

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But ultimately, if it's an animal in nature, if you hit it and go home, the problem that you're going to have probably on the other flip side of this coin is, because there's always two sides, there's the side where the state is going to investigate the crash or the local city or what have you, but then there's the side where you have to go to your insurance company and they say, "Hey, why is your whole front end destroyed?" So usually you want to have some type of report number, or least a driver report, and that's where it comes into contacting the police and just documenting it. So your insurance company isn't asking you, "Where's the report?"

Derek Perez:

Documentation is key. It's part of being that mature, aware, responsible driver. Now let me follow up. We've talked about the various things one can hit, but what about inanimate objects like property damage? Like you hit a mailbox or a telephone pole or even another parked car. Does that require the same response?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, the thing with that is if it's an unattended vehicle and you hit it, let's say, for example, this happens a lot in Orlando, you hit a car that's in the street, like a residential street, you go around, you're knocking on doors, nobody's answering so on and so forth. So at that point, it's a slight fender bender. You might've scratched up the side of the car. At that point, you need to leave information on that vehicle. You need to leave your name, number. Just all the information you can, your name, your number, your tag number, your license number. And just give them a quick note saying, "Hey, I was going down the road, I hit your vehicle. Please contact me." And then at the same time you want to contact the police as well. You can still report it, say, "Hey, look, I hit a vehicle. It's unattended. I can't find the owner of it. I've left a note on it, I've left information." Basically, you want to do everything you can to where you don't have a police officer knocking on your door later accusing you of a hit-and-run. So you can say, "Wait a minute, your honor", or in this case, the trooper, you're not in jail yet or in front of court.

Derek Perez:

Not in front of a judge.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Not in front of a judge yet, but you want to be able to say, "Hey, yeah." And then I would take a picture of it. Everybody's got a phone, take a picture of what you did. Take a picture of your note on the car and then go home and you've done your due diligence. Then you're going to contact your insurance or your parents are going to contact their insurance company.

Derek Perez:

Due diligence. That's a great phrase.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yeah, just overly document what happened and do it safely.

Derek Perez:

Well, it's good to hear that though. And it's good to hear the steps, especially for a new driver who might have that first time adrenaline, the first time their bumper or fender makes contact with anything

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from again, a mailbox to a streetlight to, as you said, a parked car. It's good to know that even if you can't find the owner of the property, that you can report it to the police, document it yourself and follow up to make sure you're covered, not just for legal reasons, but for your insurance as well.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely. And it goes back to common decency. If you have a car, let's say you're a teenager and you have your car and it's parked in the street. You can imagine how miserable it would be if you go out of your car and it's got a mark all the way down the side of it because somebody ran into it. And you're looking around, you don't see a note, and so now you're stuck with a damaged car that you have to go and file a claim with your insurance. It's just not a decent thing to do in this life. So think about the other person when these things happen, it's always good to go through life doing the right thing. And that way you can always say, "Hey, I did the right thing", and you can sleep easy at night.

Derek Perez:

We've talked about doing the right thing because it is the decent thing to do. But there are also perhaps some pretty severe penalties for leaving the scene of a crash involving everything from property damage to injury to, unfortunately, death. You could be facing a really bad situation. Now I'm given to understand that injury, serious bodily injury or death as a result of a hit-and-run can call for felony charges of various degrees and all of those result in the loss of license for at least three years, I understand.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

And that's like I said, then you will be saying, "Your Honor", you'll be talking to a judge and you'll have your parents next to you and it's just a miserable experience. And that can all be avoided, even if you're in a bad crash where let's say you hit a bicyclist and it may be your fault. You have a license, and we're talking to the audience here that they've done everything right, they don't have warrants and whatnot and they have a license. But you have a license you have insurance and you have registration, everything's good. That's what that's all for, so if you have an accident and you hit a bicyclist or what have you, there's no reason why you should feel the need to try to hide it or sneak off. And if everybody knows anything these days, everybody has a phone. Somebody's going to take a picture of you. Somebody is going to capture you on video. And it's just, it's a miserable experience.

I've had it quite a few times in my career where I've found the hit-and-run where they've actually tried to hide it because they went home to get away. They park the car and they back it in, you know, whatever. Because we just find them. I mean, you can't make a car disappear. And even if it's a week or a month later, we still find it. But anyway, we go to them and I'm thinking, "Okay, what's going to be the main reason why they left?" And it's just because they were freaked out, or they thought that they could just hide it and get away with it. It's always best if you have all your ducks in a row to just do the right thing,

Derek Perez:

Staying at the scene, always better long-term recourse than running off. I mean, you could face serious fines or even jail time. Now on the flip side and maybe our final point on this, if you're the victim of a hit-and-run, how do you take care of that?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

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Well, and that happens a lot, especially in Orlando, it happens all the time. If you're the victim of a hit-and-run, first off, just like we talked about earlier, you want to go through all those steps where you want to check your surroundings, make sure everybody's okay. But there's that moment where you've gotten out of your car or you've moved it off to the shoulder and you're looking at this other person. Now there's two ways that hit runs go, one, they take off. They hit you, they're gone, that's it. You want to just try to remember as much as you can about what you saw, like what kind of car it was, who the driver was, but you might not because you just got in a wreck. So you're a new driver, you're kind of freaked out. But if they pull over, which sometimes they do, they'll pull over, because they're just kind of looking at their car to make sure everything's okay, you want to immediately, and this is just good practice in any general crash, if you have a camera phone, you moved off, take some pictures of their car. And there's nothing wrong with that, you can do that.

You can take a picture of the back of their car, take a picture of the tag and immediately say, "Hey, I'm calling the police", let them know. And if they're going to run, at that point, they're going to get in their car like, "Okay, great", and then they get in their car and they leave. But if you've taken a picture or at least written down the tag on their car, that's going to give the police officer who comes to investigate the crash a little bit more to go by. And hopefully they might even actually be able to find this person that ran into you. And then get a good description of him, because ultimately if they don't know who the driver is, then it's going to fall on who the owner of that vehicle is. And that owner, that vehicle is going to explain why the front of their car is missing if they ran into the back of you.

But ultimately first, like we said earlier, make sure everything's okay with you because your safety is the most important thing. But secondly, a couple of clever things you need, especially people with smartphones, which everybody has them, most teenagers do now, take some pictures of that car. If that person gets a little hostile, use the little telephone thing and take it that way, and then get back in your car. But that tag is very important and if you can get a picture of the driver, either standing there, that's always good too. Just let them know you're just doing it for your safety.

Derek Perez:

And for calling him law enforcement, just a reminder, that's 911 or *FHP. Excellent. That's *347 or your local police.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yes, absolutely.

Derek Perez:

Thank you, Captain Bergstresser. When we come back, we'll talk about roadside breakdowns and wrap up this conversation on why and how to stay safely at the scene of travel disruptions.

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Derek Perez:

Okay? Two of three points for this episode are behind us. Let's turn our attention to the last one where you should largely stay at the scene, and that's a roadside breakdown. If your car breaks down when you're driving, you can feel totally helpless, right, Captain?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely.

Derek Perez:

So let's face this one head on together. You're at a stoplight and your engine starts smoking and then your car shuts off. What do you do?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, first off, if that happens to you, you always want to be, and we talked about in the earlier podcasts, talking about looking at your gauges, not just your lights and all that, but also you want, you want to be cognizant of that one that's a temperature gauge, so if it ever starts going up, you know there's an issue. So if you did get into a situation where your car starts smoking and whatnot, you immediately want to not try to get it home. I would try to immediately pull it off the road, because what's going to happen is you're going to think you can get it home and it's just going to stall right in the next big intersection. So as a young driver, first thing you need to do is look for a parking lot. If there's no parking lot, take it off onto the shoulder and you can pop the hood if you want, but either way, at that point, you want to get ahold of a loved one and start making arrangements. Smoke's not a good thing coming out of the engine.

Derek Perez:

I imagine not, I imagine not. Thanks for that answer, Captain Bergstresser. Now, simple breakdowns, that's one thing. A tire blowout on the highway is another. Now in all of these scenarios we discuss, nearly all of them require you to stay at the scene, though safely out of traffic. How do you do that if you need to assess what's wrong with your car?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, we'll use the interstate as an example. Interstates all have nice shoulders on them. So if, let's say, you have a blowout. First thing first, when you're driving down the road and you're a young driver and you feel this, sometimes you'll have a violent shaking of the car, you'll have a, not an explosion, but you will hear a bang and the tire will blow. The worst thing you can do is to snatch the wheel. You do not want to snatch the wheel, you want to just let your foot off the gas, because you're going to be having it on the gas if you're on the interstate going about 70. Let your foot off the gas, don't jam the brake, and start coasting safely, look in your mirrors. And if you're already in the right lane, just coast on to that shoulder, just take it nice and easy. Don't jerk the wheel. I've seen too many times where people have a blowout and they jerked the wheel or they jammed the brakes and it causes them to either flip or just causes a whole chaotic event. So smoothly go off onto that shoulder and just don't go onto the pavement, if you can go off onto the grass a little bit, go off on the grass a little bit. The further off, the

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better, I wouldn't say go down into the ditch, but go parallel to that grass/paved shoulder, well off the road.

At that point, hit that hazard lights that you have. And that's something that we didn't talk about it earlier, but just like your wiper switch, your headlights, which you want to know where your hazard switch is. It's pretty conspicuous. It's got that triangle, you push that on and then your hazard lights are on. So you want to let the traffic around you know that, "Hey, something's wrong, I've broken down and I'm not just sitting here, I have a situation."

Derek Perez:

So it sounds like you want to, if you're able to, pull completely off the pavement. So if you're on an interstate or highway, you have about at least five feet from the length of the road. Yeah?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

At least. Yeah, definitely.

Derek Perez:

There, you can pull out, if you're able to change the tire yourself, a jack from your car and put on a spare. But you always want to maintain that awareness, that peripheral vision for traffic coming from the other direction. Yes, sir?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Derek Perez:

And if you can pull off the road completely, as you said, and wait a safe distance away while waiting for roadside assistance, you're going to want to do that.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yes, definitely.

Derek Perez:

Now you mentioned your hazards. Are there any other ways of being visible and being seen from at least 200 feet away for your fellow motorists?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, yeah, there are. Definitely, and this is something I recommend to all new drivers, you have a little kit in your car that has, let's say, fix a flat, there's flares. In the old days, there were flares, you had to strike them and they were kind of messy, but they also start a little fire there.

Derek Perez:

I remember those. They had a plume of pink fire with smoke coming out of them. They were okay quite dramatic.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

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They were always interesting to light them. But now they have what's called electronic flares, which are very bright. You can get a little case of those. You can set those up near the back of your vehicle, set them out maybe in a pattern to where when cars are, and this is on the interstate we're talking about. In a local neighborhood, probably not. You could maybe put one or two out, but your hazards should be enough on a little local street. But on the interstate, if you do have electronic flares, put them out behind the vehicle so when traffic's going that way, they see you from a distance.

But ultimately, if possible, you don't want to sit inside the vehicle, you want to sit outside of it. If it's a hot day or whatever, you don't want to sit in there. Because sometimes people see a broken-down vehicle and they tend to drift toward them. So you want to be careful with that. People kind of drift over. So I always say, if you can, if there's like, let's say a little wood line or something to kind of sit back a little bit from the vehicle if you can. If not, there are cases where you can sit in the car and keep the engine running. If it's just a tire blown out and most folks have AAA, which is something that, we partnered with AAA in our safe summer travel campaign this year. So it's something that, AAA is a good thing to have in case you have a blow out because they will come and change your tire for you. The other side to that is that we also have on the interstates, we have Road Rangers in most places. So Road Ranger can give you gas, they can also give you air for a tire and help jack up the car and get the tire changed.

Derek Perez:

How do you reach one of those Road Rangers?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

You can call *FHP (*347), and then that way they'll contact them and get them out there to you.

Derek Perez:

That's good to know. I've been driving in Florida streets for years and was not aware of that service. That's excellent. So after pulling completely off the pavement and making sure you're visible from at least 200 feet away, another bit of advice is to try not to hide, if there's a streetlight or something parked there, just in case the sun sets so you remain visible at all hours, whether or not you have access to those roadside flares. But if you're waiting outside of your car and it's a hot day, you're probably going to want to have some supplies. Let's talk about the kind of kit you might want to put together in your car on the chance that you have a flat or a breakdown so that you're safe and able to service your vehicle and maintain your health and safety throughout the experience.

The list I have, and I'd love your input on this, Captain, would include a portable gas tank, something that is empty and clean of gas, but that can be filled in an emergency need. A first aid kit, of course. Everything from antiseptic to band-aids to even a simple Tylenol to help if you are feeling under the weather while driving. Now, we get a little bit more advanced with jumper cables, a spare tire, jacks and tire irons to assist with jumping a dead battery or changing a flat. As our Captain pointed out, warning triangles or flares to make yourselves visible. Should we enter onto the other side, something we don't experience here in Florida very often, but should the weather be exceptionally cold, having some blankets, which also double as protection from sun and they can be used for shade as well as warmth. You're going to want something so simple, paper towels. Paper towels to clear any spills, spilled fluids, anything that you might want to clean up, including wiping down an obscured windshield. Here's an important one, ladies and gentlemen, drinking water. And it's always overlooked because we all think

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we can just make it to that next gas station. But having potable drinking water in the vehicle can be the difference between you having a simple flat tire and this becoming a life-threatening experience.

A couple of other good things to have with you would include nonperishable snacks, in case you have to wait for roadside assistance and a sun shield to protect you from the unfortunately punishing rays of the sun here in the sunshine state. Another one you don't want to forget is, if you're prescribed any medications by your physician, you're going to want to have those whenever you take a long road trip, because you could be stranded and you don't want to miss your next important dose of prescribed medication. Did I leave anything out, Captain?

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well, out of those, I mean those are all great suggestions looking at it. The ones that stand out to me the most are first aid kit, because sometimes you might actually, and this is not even something that has to do with having a disabled vehicle or breaking down, you might be a witness to a bad crash. So you might be purposely stopped because the roadway shut down. So sometimes if you have a first aid kit that might come in handy and help some other driver that may be injured. So that's something that's rare, but it's also something to think about. It's not only stuff that could help you if you get into a breakdown or whatnot, but it can also help other people that you encounter on the road.

The other big one is definitely making sure the spare tire is right, making sure it's got air in it, but there's a thing called fix a flat. They're called different things. That's something else that can really help you. Sometimes you just get a little nail in the tire and it makes your tire go down. That fix a flat can get you on your way and get you at least off to someplace that you can get your tire changed. The electronic flares, which I recommend, I don't recommend the ones you strike anymore. I think the electronic ones are very bright. That's something, if you travel at night, let's say you work at night and you have to get an interstate from whatever place you work at as a young person, if you did break down, those are worth their weight in gold because your hazards may work for a while but the electronic flares really, and it's not a really a big bulky thing. They usually come in a small kit and you can bring them out.

Derek Perez:

It sounds like if you're waiting for a long time that your battery might run down on your hazards, but the battery on those LED flares, they can last a really long time.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Yeah, they last a while. Yeah, definitely. At least long enough for you to get somebody out there, hopefully, to help you. Drinking water's another big one. And drinking water isn't just so you stay hydrated, sometimes your car might need a little water. So it might be something where you just overheated, you let it basically cool down a little bit, and this is for maybe a more advanced driver, but then you add water to it. And then the same thing goes for if you come upon an accident that's blocking the road and you might say, "Hey, let me give some water to these people because they had some trauma."

And lastly, the medication one, that's specifically for people, and it's not mentioned here, the diabetes is one thing, we do have that happen a lot, we have people go into a diabetic issue out there because they're on the highway. And sometimes that's why they pull over. They're not disabled, but it's because they have low blood sugar. And then we have to have EMS out there to help them. But something else that a driver might think about, and these people probably know this anyway, but the epi pen is important because if you do unfortunately break down, pull off onto the shoulder there, there's a lot of

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different bugs and whatnot out there. If you do have a propensity for that, you might want to make sure you have your epi-pen, maybe an extra one. So if something bites you, you can take care of yourself.

Derek Perez:

Excellent advice. And that was three very important points, Captain Bergstresser. And that means the end of our ride together, no pun intended. I really enjoyed your company and your input, Captain.

Captain Peter Bergstresser:

Well I really had fun and I hope that the younger drivers out there got something from what I've had to say. And just remember, I've spoke from my experience, so hopefully these are things, especially with hit-and-runs and whatnot that we've talked about, that they just remember that accidents are accidents. It's just simply a thing that can happen to anybody. Don't let it freak you out. And then always just be cognizant of what your vehicle can do. Make sure that the vehicle is safely maintained, because at the end of the day, the vehicle and you should be a happy memory in your future. And it's something that you have to take seriously. So hopefully everybody got something out of this and I want everybody to have a great summer.

Derek Perez:

All right, great advice. From myself, please, please new young drivers, take your time, be alert, drive courteously and cautiously. Treat other motorists the way you'd want to be treated and arrive alive. Well, we're not done with 3PointTurn yet, our next four episodes we'll introduce another Florida Highway Patrol voice to the conversation. Make sure you tune into this. Until next time, drive safe, Florida.

FLHSMV:

On the next episode of 3PointTurn, the FLHSMV team welcomes Florida Highway Patrol Master Corporal Patricia Jefferson-Shaw to understand Florida's Move Over Law and three main points within it.

Check out our other episodes from the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts. You can also find us at FLHSMV.gov. Follow FLHSMV's social media channels for helpful safety tips, news and information.