SAFETY BULLETIN

When our minds go on “automatic pilot,” our driving habits had better be good ones.

Some experts estimate that even the safest drivers spend 75 percent of their driving time thinking about home, work, the upcoming vacation or other seemingly important matters. If that is the case, we daily use habits instead of a conscious decision-making process to deal with potential life and death situations related to our driving environment. This is a sobering thought when you consider that approximately 50,000 people will die in traffic accidents this year.

The following is the first of several seeing habits that, when used regularly, may keep you avoid a serious accident.

MAKE SURE YOU SEE FAR ENOUGH AHEAD.

One of the goals in avoiding a traffic accident is to recognize potential hazards early enough that you can take evasive action if the circumstances develop in a way that threatens your safety. Evasive actions like stopping or changing lanes can take up a lot of distance in a very short time, so you must recognize potential accident producing conditions well ahead of you.

Most good drivers make a habit of looking ahead the distance they will travel in 12 to 15 seconds. At slower speeds, that is about one block, and at highway speeds it is about a quarter of a mile. If you are not in the habit of looking that far ahead, you may not be able to stop or make lane changes safely.

Develop the habit of looking for traffic lights that are ready to change from yellow to red, emergency vehicles that need the right of way, brake lights from stopped vehicles or caution signs for construction zones. Following trucks or buses too closely or for long periods of time restricts your ability to see well down the road. Avoid these visual obstacles. Looking 12 to 15 seconds ahead does not mean that you forget about what is happening closer to you.

Among other things, maintain a safe following distance between you and the vehicle in front of you, and avoid vehicles that are being driven in an erratic manner. Watch for road conditions and debris that could damage tires or cause you to lose control of your vehicle.