

Aggressive Driving and Road Rage: They aren't the same



The terms aggressive driving and road rage are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same. There is a major difference between the two.

Aggressive driving

Aggressive driving is a traffic offense or combination of offenses such as following too closely, speeding, unsafe lane changes, failing to signal intent to change lanes, and other forms of negligent or inconsiderate driving. The trigger for the aggressive driver is usually traffic congestion coupled with a schedule that is almost impossible to meet. As a result, the aggressive driver generally commits multiple violations in an attempt to make up time. Unfortunately, these actions put the rest of us at risk. For example, an aggressive driver who resorts to using a roadway shoulder to pass may startle other drivers and cause them to take an evasive action that results in more risk or even a crash. Meanwhile, the offending aggressive driver continues on his or her way, perhaps oblivious

of what he or she has caused. Rush hour crashes, which are frequently caused by aggressive drivers, are a major contributor to congestion and 10 percent of these rush hour crashes contribute to a second crash.

Road rage

Road rage, on the other hand, is a criminal offense. This occurs when a traffic incident escalates into a far more serious situation. For example, a person may become so angry over an aggressive driving incident that he or she overreacts and retaliates with some type of violence. These violent acts may range from a physical confrontation to an assault with a motor vehicle or possibly a weapon. Often, the roadway incident that caused the person to become enraged may have been something quite simple and even trivial. Some incidents, by their very nature, are intentional acts, such as when a motorist switches from lane to lane in an effort to go around other vehicles. But others may have been committed unintentionally, such as when a motorist makes an abrupt exit from a roadway without properly signaling his or her intent. Perhaps you have seen this maneuver or even done it yourself when you suddenly realized you were at your exit.

Public's concern

Throughout the country, the public's concern over aggressive driving continues to grow. Some studies indicate the public is actually more fearful of aggressive drivers than it is of impaired drivers. Aggressive driving is truly dangerous and cannot be tolerated. Several states are considering legislation to deal specifically with the aggressive driving issue.

The media should make a conscious effort to report traffic incidents as aggressive driving and not attempt to sensationalize them as road rage. Law enforcement officers also have a responsibility to educate the media on the differences in these two terms. The public will then begin to understand that the majority of reported road rage incidents are really examples of careless, negligent, or impudent vehicle operation and not violent criminal acts.

The public also plays a role in making roadways safer. The public should report aggressive driving incidents to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. In many parts of the country, motorists can easily report aggressive drivers, impaired drivers, or other unsafe highway incidents over their cellular telephone by using simple numbers, such as #77. If this is the case in your community, remind motorists that they should use their cellular phone safely and let a passenger make the call, use hands-free operation, or pull off the road when making the call. They should not be distracted from the task of driving.

Many road rage incidents have resulted from drivers overreacting and allowing their egos to stand in the way of common sense and good judgment rather than safely reporting aggressive driving incidents. A simple display of common courtesy will often be appreciated and may even become contagious. Try it! It might work.

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