

Press Release

Numerous accidents caused by risky overtaking maneuvers

If in Doubt, Don't Risk It!

- High risk on country roads
- If you have even the slightest doubt, do not overtake
- People often underestimate the distance needed to overtake

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Risky overtaking maneuvers are responsible for many traffic crashes. Often, these cases involved misjudgment, carelessness, and recklessness. Almost a third of all people killed on country roads in Germany in 2020 died in accidents involving oncoming traffic. Experts at DEKRA issue a reminder to always take heed of the following main rule when overtaking: “If in doubt, don't risk it!”

“If you start to overtake, you have to be aware that you may only do this as long as you can safely avoid any hindrance or hazard to others for the entire maneuver,” says Stefanie Ritter, accident researcher at DEKRA, referring to Paragraph 5 of the German Traffic Code. Overtaking vehicles must also be traveling much faster than those being overtaken and may not break the speed limit.

Is the stretch of road clear and completely visible?

“It also goes without saying that you can only overtake where it is permitted.” What's more, to overtake safely, you need to be a good multi-tasker. “Before I pull out, I have to look behind and check that another vehicle hasn't started to overtake me, which would then have priority,” explains Ritter. “At the same time, I have to keep a close eye on the road in front of me and check the following: Is it free of oncoming traffic? Can I see the entire stretch of road? How are the vehicles I want to overtake driving? Is the free stretch of road long enough for the maneuver? And I must also remember to indicate.”

People often underestimate how much distance you need to overtake. “Many people don't know that you need around twice as much distance as required for the overtaking maneuver alone,” explains Ritter. “You have to be aware that oncoming traffic may appear at any time, that you have to keep your distance from other vehicles, and that the speed limit on country roads is 100 km/h. To overtake a truck traveling at 60 km/h, you need a clear stretch of road of almost 600 meters from the start of the maneuver.”

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It is this fact, along with high speeds, that make overtaking on country roads so dangerous. Risky overtaking maneuvers are the second most common cause of fatal accidents here. “If you have even the faintest doubt, you should never overtake,” emphasizes Ritter. “This applies without exception if bends or the brow of a hill restrict visibility, or if you are near crossroads and junctions.” The accident researcher also strongly advises against jumping a line of traffic. “By doing this, you are not only endangering yourself, but also others. It is not worth making a life-threatening maneuver for such a small gain in terms of time.”

Vehicles being overtaken must not speed up

When pulling back in, you have to keep a sufficient distance from the vehicle you have overtaken. You must not cut them up or force them to brake. As for vehicles that are being overtaken, they must not accelerate, and have to allow an overtaking vehicle to pull back in. Mutual consideration is required here.

The greatest care is needed when overtaking agricultural vehicles. This applies above all if their turn signals are dirty or concealed by machinery – they may therefore not be visible to the following traffic and a tractor could therefore turn off “unannounced.” And sometimes, on narrow roads, extra-wide or loaded vehicles may mean that space is too tight to overtake while leaving enough distance.

It is also important to remember that you may only overtake cyclists, motorcycles, and other single-track vehicles in built-up areas while leaving the distance required by the law of the country. In Germany, minimum distance is 1.5 meters in built-up areas; outside of them, it is 2 meters. The latter is also recommended for built-up areas when it comes to overtaking children on bicycles. When driving past waiting public or school buses, a minimum distance of 2 meters should also be maintained.

About DEKRA

DEKRA has been active in the field of safety for almost 100 years. Founded in 1925 in Berlin as Deutscher Kraftfahrzeug-Überwachungs-Verein e.V., it is today one of the world's leading expert organizations. DEKRA SE is a subsidiary of DEKRA e.V. and manages the Group's operating business. In 2020, DEKRA generated turnover totaling almost EUR 3.2 billion. The company currently employs around 44,000 people in approximately 60 countries on all continents. With qualified and independent expert services, they work for safety on the road, at work and at home. These services range from vehicle inspection and expert appraisals to claims services, industrial and building inspections, safety consultancy, testing and certification of products and systems, as well as training courses and temporary work. The vision for the company's 100th birthday in 2025 is that DEKRA will be the global partner for a safe, secure, and sustainable world. With a platinum rating from EcoVadis, DEKRA is now in the top one percent of sustainable businesses ranked.