

Safety Tips for Taxi Drivers



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Taxi driving is a dangerous job in Canada.

Reasons:

- You work alone, often where there are few people nearby.
- You often work in dim lighting or darkness.
- You carry ready cash.
- You deal with new customers every day.

This booklet of safety tips can help you keep yourself and your co-workers safe. There are many things you can do yourself, every day, to work safely.

In the taxi industry, the person with the main responsibility to keep you safe on the job is the license holder—the person who was issued the taxi license.

License holders must do all they reasonably can to keep drivers healthy and safe at work, or they are violating the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

You are also protected by workplace violence prevention regulations. October 1, 2007 is the deadline for your license holder to assess the risks of violence. A prevention plan to reduce or eliminate risks must be ready by April 1, 2008.

Here are some tips to help you understand and avoid the dangers of your job.

Safety Tips

Arrange a code word with the dispatcher

Your radio is the most important piece of equipment in your vehicle. It links you with a dispatcher. The dispatcher is your lifeline. If a dispatcher notices that you are acting strangely, they can tell you are in trouble—and get you help.

- **Arrange a code word** that you can use to warn the dispatcher of a possible problem. A code word can alert the dispatcher to trouble without letting your customer know you are worried.
- **If you are an independent taxi driver, get a cell phone.** Arrange a contact person who knows your code word for danger. Talk to them about what they should do if you call and use that code word to ask for help.

Be alert and aware

Stay aware of what is going on around you, both when you are parked and when you are driving. Don't give someone the chance to sneak up on you and catch you by surprise.

- **Make eye contact with every customer** who enters your vehicle. This sends a simple but powerful message to them—"I see you. You see me. I can identify you if I need to."
- **Any customer could be a danger to you. Watch their body language.** Trust your instincts, and then act to stay safe.

Alarming Facts

A survey of Canadian taxi drivers showed that in one year, one in four had been attacked. Almost that many had their vehicle damaged. One out of 10 had been robbed of money. More than one in 12 had other things stolen from them. One in 25 were hijacked.¹

Keep cash and other valuables out of sight

- **Don't wear expensive watches, neck chains, or bracelets.** You may become a target for robbery. If you wear a neck chain, make sure it is thin enough to break before it harms you.
- **Carry as little money as you can.** If your customer offers you a large bill (\$50, \$100), tell them you will stop at a nearby garage or store so they can get it changed into smaller bills. **DO NOT** show them that you have money to change it.
- **Never tell customers that you have had a good shift.** Some customers might ask if you have had a good day and made lots of money. Most people just want to talk, but some may be trying to decide if you are worth robbing. Gently change the subject.
- **Don't let customers know that your shift is almost over.** They may think that you are carrying a lot of cash.

Keep your windows up and doors locked

Open windows only enough to speak to people without them being able to reach through and cause injury or take property such as the vehicle keys. This is extremely important if you are parked at a common stand.

- **Locked doors help you control where the customer sits.** You can make sure that the customer sits in the rear seat, if you wish. Don't let people to take you by surprise.

Be extra alert at night

Nights and evenings are the most dangerous times for you to work. Lighting is poor. Fewer people are around to witness a robbery or attack. Staying extra alert will keep you safer.

Beware of unclear instructions

Ask customers where they want to go before you drive away. If they are unsure or pause before they give you an answer, this is a sign that you should be alert and suspicious. If they say “just start driving, we will tell you the way,” this may be a danger sign for you.

- Drive only when you know where you are going. Politely tell the customer that the taxi company rules say that you must get an exact address.
- When the customer gives you an address, use your radio to tell the dispatcher the address. This will warn the dispatcher that you may have a problem. It will let the customer know that the dispatcher and others know where you are going.
- If the customer suddenly changes their mind and asks you to go to a different address while you are driving, tell the dispatcher the new address right away.
- If a customer is making you nervous, you might want to ask them to get out of the taxi. If you do, be sure to go to a well-lit, public place—such as a gas station—before you ask them to leave. If they get angry, they are less likely to hurt you if there are people around to see.

Alarming Facts

Statistics Canada has reported that between 2001 and 2005 taxi driving was the most dangerous job in Canada. Of 69 murders that occurred because of a person’s work, 11 were taxi drivers. That is one more than the number of police officers that were killed at work. ²

Be careful of customers seated behind you

- Try not to let customers sit right behind you, if you can avoid it. Ask them to move over to the right side of the seat. You can use any excuse, such as taxi company rules, to politely ask them to move.
- Use a special rear view mirror that will allow you to see all the rear seat at once. This sends a message to the customer that you can see them.

Beware of danger areas

- Be especially alert when driving on streets where you or other drivers have seen violence before.
- Avoid driving into dangerous areas such as dimly lit alleys. If you must, back your vehicle in, keep the engine running, and stay inside your vehicle.

Carry a spare key

Keep a spare key to the vehicle in your pocket. A thief or hijacker may throw your keys away before leaving, thinking they have left you stranded and unable to get help. If they leave the vehicle a short distance away, you can find it after they leave using the spare key and drive for help.

Keep an even temper

Losing your temper or arguing with a customer could lead to violence. It is best to keep calm. Do not give the upset customer any excuse to attack you.

Stay in your car

If you see a fight or other violence outside your vehicle, stay safely away. Contact your dispatcher or the police for help.

Do not pursue fare evaders

If a customer leaves your vehicle without paying, or does not return from a building with money they owe you, do not follow them! Going into an unknown building to confront a customer is dangerous. Report these incidents to the police.

Do not resist

If someone tries to rob you, they want your money and maybe the car. Give it to them. Do not fight. If you resist, you may be in even more danger. Your vehicle and money can be replaced—your life cannot.

Memorize the person's description

After a robbery or attack, write down everything you can remember about the person right away. Use your notes to tell the police as much as you can.

Try to remember these details: male or female, race/colour, age, height, weight, hair colour/style, eye colour, scars/tattoos, facial hair, voice, the person's clothes, any weapon used, and exactly what the customer said. Keep a pen and notebook in your car so you can take notes as soon as something happens.



Invest in safety equipment

Safety devices can greatly reduce the dangers of taxi driving. The devices below reduce the risk of robbery and attack, and may help prosecute those who commit these crimes:

- **Shields—half or full** protect you from attackers in the rear of the taxi. These greatly reduce the number of robberies and attacks. Winnipeg, Baltimore, and New York have 80 per cent fewer taxi crimes since drivers started using shields.

Half shields cost \$800 or more. Full shields cost \$1400 and up. Shields can usually be put in or taken out of a vehicle in only 20 minutes.



- **Closed Circuit Cameras** record what happens inside the taxi. These have reduced taxi crime by half in Toronto. If the quality of the picture or video is good enough, they can also be used in court to prove who robbed or attacked you.
- **Global Positioning Systems (GPS)** track where the taxi is at all times. Can help find a stolen taxi.
- **Locks controlled by the driver** allow you to decide when and where a customer will enter your taxi.

- A safety release latch in the trunk gives you a way to escape if you are trapped in there by an attacker.
- Cashless systems that use only debit and or credit cards discourage robbers.
- Silent alarms, sometimes called bandit lights
Alert the police and others that you are in danger.

If you have more ideas or questions about how you can keep you and your co-workers safe at work, please contact us using the information on the back of this booklet.

- 1 Stenning, P., 1996. Fare Game, Fare Cop: Victimization of, and Policing by, Taxi Drivers in Three Canadian Cities, Department of Criminal Justice, Ottawa, Canada.
- 2 StatsCan: Criminal Victimization in the Workplace 2007.

Contact the Police

In an EMERGENCY call: **9-1-1** (all Nova Scotia)

For non-emergencies

Halifax Regional Municipality

Phone: **1-902-490-5020**

Internet: www.halifax.ca

RCMP - Mainland NS outside Halifax Regional Municipality

Phone: **1-902-426-7766**

Internet: www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/ns

Cape Breton Regional Police Service

Phone: **1-902-563-5100**

Internet: www.cbrm.ns.ca

Other contact numbers

Halifax Regional Municipality Taxi & Limousine Licensing Office

Phone: **1-902-490-2551**

Internet: www.halifax.ca

Tourism Industry Association Nova Scotia (TIANS)

Taxi Driver Training

Phone: **1-902-423-4480**

Internet: www.tians.org

Halifax Taxi Drivers Association

Phone: **1-902-405-3989**

Internet: www.hfxtaxi.com



Environment and Labour
Occupational Health and Safety

This booklet was prepared by the Occupational Health and Safety Division of Nova Scotia Environment and Labour, in partnership with other organizations concerned about taxi driver safety.

For more information on working safely, please contact us at:
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Phone: 1-902-424-5400 or
Toll-free: 1-800-952-2687 (NS only)
Fax: 1-902-424-5640
Internet: www.gov.ns.ca/enla/healthandsafety

