

INTERNAL COMBUSTION

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IT'S A SHAME THAT DEATHS DUE TO WRONGLY PARKED VEHICLES HAVE DOUBLED IN THE LAST THREE YEARS

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Some recent reports show an alarming increase in loss of life because of collisions with parked vehicles. Actually, in the last three years, the number of deaths due to ramming into wrongly parked vehicles has doubled! In 2017, the recorded number was 2,317 and 5,086, in 2019! Such sad incidents continue to happen. Last month, 14 people, including six children, died on the Prayagraj Lucknow national highway, when the SUV they were travelling in rammed into a truck parked dangerously on the road. Apparently the truck had a flat tyre and the driver did

not move to the extreme left and find a spot away from the road to park his truck. The fear of further damaging the punctured tyre, may have led him to stop it directly in the path of other vehicles using this busy highway. This is not an isolated case. Our truck and bus drivers do this all the time, as do many private vehicle drivers.

The SP of Pratapgarh, Anurag Arya told the Times of India that the parked truck did not have the retro-reflective tapes to alert approaching vehicles. The driver had also not given any cautionary sign to alert other drivers about the parked vehicle. This even as use of retro-reflective tapes on commercial and transport vehicles is mandatory as per the Motor Vehicle Rules to obtain a fitness certificate.

Please note the statement, “driver had also not given any cautionary sign” and the term “retro-reflective tapes”. As many of you must have noticed, nearly all Indian drivers don’t give any such “cautionary signs”. At the most, they put some stones or broken branches behind or in front of their parked vehicles. And these are of no real use, because they are not easily visible in the dark. In fact, other vehicles often sustain damage when they run into such stupidly placed stones.

Instead of all this, every driver should turn on the hazard lights (flasher), when they park or break down on the road. The hazard light is now a mandatory fitment on most vehicles sold in India, but it’s rarely ever used for the purpose it is meant for, which is “warning all other road users and drivers of any stationary vehicle that may pose a hazard requiring additional care and caution while approaching or passing”.

Yes, the hazard lights are only meant to be used when your vehicle becomes a potential hazard for other road users. If you’re parked on the road to repair a puncture or if your vehicle has broken down, it becomes a hazard and this is when you switch on the hazard lights and warn other drivers of your vehicle’s presence. In fact in many advanced countries it is strictly forbidden to put on the hazard light while driving. But this is exactly what many of us do in India. Enter a tunnel and you will see lots of the vehicles around you switch on the hazard

lights, which is wrong. And if visibility drops or it rains heavily, again many India motorists turn on the hazard lights. In such situations of low visibility you are meant to use your parking lights and headlights and fog lights (if your vehicle is fitted with them). But no, most Indians insist on using the hazard light. This has to change, with hazard lights only being used as illuminators on parked vehicles.

Another thing that is now mandatory on the majority of vehicles sold in India is the warning triangle. This is a red triangle with a foldable stand and it’s normally made of plastic and metal. The warning triangle or safety triangle has a highly reflective surface and in case you stop right on the road, you are supposed to put this triangle about 10 to 15 feet behind your vehicle to alert other drivers and road users that they are approaching an unexpected stationary vehicle. But sadly, this again is something most Indian drivers neglect to do, despite the fact that they may well have the triangle sitting idle inside the boot. Yes, the warning triangle is seldom used for what it’s intended and if you do happen to see one, it’s likely to be fitted on the front of a truck or bus, as a decorative accessory. This again is something that must change and we got to get more people to properly use a safety triangle.

Finally, let’s look at the “retro-reflective tapes” part. It’s good that they are now mandatory on commercial and transport vehicles to obtain a fitness certificate as per the Motor Vehicle Rules. But what I want to ask is “why retro”? Why can’t reflective strips be factory fitted? And when will we have laws about the size of the taillights being proportionate to the overall size of the vehicle? Presently, some trucks and buses have taillights that are smaller than those found on hatchbacks! And nobody bothers checking if they are working properly. And even if they are, many are covered and blocked from view by some protective grille or panel. Yes, in most cases the taillights of heavy commercial vehicles in India are not visible due to one reason or the other. This has to change too. A vehicle must be visible when it’s stopped on a road. Or we will continue to have rising cases of deaths due to ramming into them. 