

Your guide to a safer workplace

VICTORIAN TAXI DRIVER SAFETY



Victorian Taxi Directorate
Department of Infrastructure



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Keep this booklet somewhere safe in your taxi where you can easily access it and refer to the information regularly to remind yourself of what you can do to stay safe.

Taxi drivers play an important role in the public transport system. Every year Victorian taxi drivers carry an estimated 45 million passengers, providing a safe and reliable transport option, particularly during the late night and early morning hours. But it is vital that, as a driver, you remember there are potential dangers to working in the taxi industry and your personal safety is your first priority at all times.

This information booklet has been put together by the Victorian Taxi Directorate with the assistance of the Victorian Taxi Association, Victorian Taxi Drivers Association, Victoria Police, Victorian WorkCover Authority, and taxi depots to alert taxi drivers of the potential dangers of working in the industry and what they can do to maintain safety for themselves and their passengers.

Taxi driver emergency information card

Please detach the taxi driver emergency information card from the front of this booklet, fill out your depot's contact details and keep it with you at all times. This card summarises what to do and who to contact in case of fare evasion, assault and difficult passengers.

Taxi driver emergency information card
Your SAFETY is your first priority at all times. Use this information in an emergency.

Fare evasion

1. Stay in your vehicle — do not risk your safety by chasing offender(s).
2. Report offence to Victoria Police — attend nearest police station, if in danger call 000.
3. Report theft to your depot immediately.
4. Write down as many details of offender(s) as you can remember.

Assault

1. Activate your alarm to alert your depot — stay in your car. Lock your door.
2. If you are hurt, call 000 immediately.
3. If you are not hurt, attend nearest police station.

Dealing with difficult passengers

1. Be polite, don't take insults or offensive language personally.
2. You may refuse a fare if a passenger is violent, misbehaving or offensive.
3. Prior to leaving, you may ask for proof of passengers' ability to pay, or for a deposit up to the estimated trip cost.

Contact details

_____ (and ambulance)

• If you see anything suspicious call Crime Stoppers, 1800 333 000

For additional support, you should consider contacting:

- Victims of Crime Helpline, 1800 819 817 (8.30am - 5pm, Monday to Friday or leave a message outside these hours)

Victorian Taxi Directorate
Department of Infrastructure www.taxi.vic.gov.au

Use your emergency card when involved in an incident.

Know the risks

As a taxi driver, you face many personal safety risks because you:

- work alone
- work at night
- work long shifts, increasing the risk of fatigue
- work in isolated and high-crime areas
- have cash on hand
- always deal with strangers.

While only a small number of drivers are injured on the job each year, these factors can make you a potential target for difficult or aggressive passengers, fare evasion, robbery and assault.

You should also be aware of language and cultural differences which may lead to misunderstandings and arguments.

Remember, your personal safety and that of your passengers is your number one priority.

It is important to note that most violent incidents and robberies:

- occur between midnight and 4am
- occur on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights
- result from street hails rather than bookings
- involve young males under 25 years of age
- occur or originate in unsafe locations.

Being aware of these facts and taking greater care when exposed to these situations will help keep you safe.



Taxi drivers face more challenges working at night.

Reduce the risks

Given the potential risks and dangers of working in the taxi industry, here are some techniques to help manage high risk situations with passengers.

1. Dealing with difficult or aggressive passengers

You may encounter difficult or aggressive passengers while working shifts in busy nightlife areas where alcohol and drugs can influence passenger behaviour. Knowing how to handle these situations is something you will develop with experience as a taxi driver. The following are tips all drivers should follow.

• **Interact with your passengers.**

Always greet passengers at the start of the trip and make eye contact throughout the journey. Being friendly and caring towards your passengers makes it more difficult for them to treat you with disrespect.

Be friendly and courteous towards your passengers.



- When faced with an angry passenger, **stay calm and speak clearly in brief sentences.** Remaining calm in these situations increases your awareness of your surroundings and may encourage the passenger to calm down.
- If you are hailed, **stop your taxi a short distance past the passenger(s)** so you can assess the situation. If the passenger(s) is behaving erratically when walking towards the taxi or you feel unsafe, you have time to drive off before they reach the taxi. Contact your depot so they can notify other drivers in the area of the potential hazard.
- If a customer asks you to **take more passengers than your taxi is licensed to carry**, politely explain that you cannot do so by law and **suggest they take two taxis.** If the customer persists with the request, refuse the fare and keep driving.

You have the right to refuse to take passengers or terminate a hiring if they are violent, noisy, misbehaving, filthy or offensive.

2. Avoiding an assault

Sometimes passengers can become violent, particularly if under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Spotting the warning signs and acting on them can help avoid an attack.

- **Keep all doors locked and windows wound up until you want to let passengers in.** This helps direct passengers to the correct seat and prevents unwanted passengers entering the vehicle.
- **If picking up a single passenger, ask them not to sit directly behind you.** This is your primary danger zone – the majority of taxi driver assaults result from a person sitting behind the driver.
- **Be alert and aware of your surroundings and the passengers' behaviour.** If they start acting suspiciously, contact your depot and notify them of your location and situation.
- **Keep an eye on passengers through the rear view mirror.** This alerts passengers that you can see what they are doing and can identify them.
- If a security camera is fitted, **point out** to difficult or misbehaving passengers that **they are being recorded.**
- **Do not threaten attackers.** If you are threatened with a weapon, remain calm and cooperate with the assailant's demands, even if it means giving up your night's takings and your vehicle. No amount of money or property is worth risking your life.



3. Avoiding a robbery

Taxi drivers often have large amounts of cash on hand, particularly towards the end of a shift, making them a prime target for robbery. However, by following these simple tips you can help avoid it happening to you.

- **Always lock your taxi**, particularly when you are not inside the vehicle.
- **Never carry large cash amounts.** Deposit cash in well-lit ATMs or leave some at home while on a break during your shift.
- **Never display your money to passengers.** When passengers are paying for their fare only expose your float, keep the rest of your takings out of sight.

- **Play poor.** Should a passenger ask how your day has been or whether you have been busy, always reply with 'No, it's been a little slow today' or 'I've only just started my shift'. While most passengers are just being friendly, some might be trying to determine whether you have money to steal.
- **Always promote non-cash payments.** If passengers ask you to change a large note (\$100) explain that you only have a small amount of change but they can pay with EFTPOS, credit cards or taxi vouchers.
- **Don't wear expensive looking jewellery.** It may make you a target for robbery.



Encourage the use of electronic transactions instead of cash.

Remember, put your safety first and always report incidents to the police.

4. Avoiding fare evasion

Fare evasion or 'doing a runner' is a major problem in the taxi industry as it robs taxi drivers of their hard earned money and is often a difficult situation to pre-empt. You can help reduce the chances of being a victim of fare evasion by following the tips below for every job you take.

- **Ask for an exact address.** If you are hailed and a passenger gives you a vague address, be wary, particularly if the destination mentioned is far from your current location. Ask the passenger for a more specific address. If the passenger does not give an exact address, this may be a sign that they do not have the fare. If you are feeling uncertain about the passenger, call your depot and advise them of your destination. This alerts the passenger that they are being monitored.
- **Settle the payment inside the taxi.** Do not allow passengers to pay at the driver's window as this increases the likelihood of fare evasion, robbery and assault.

- **Always use your judgement.** If you are concerned about your passenger's ability to pay the fare, you are entitled to ask for proof or request a deposit. Do this at the beginning of the journey to help prevent fare evasion occurring later in the trip.
- If you are a victim of fare evasion, **do not leave your taxi to give chase.** Use common sense – is chasing after a 'runner' for a \$50 fare more important than your life? Your vehicle is your lifeline – it is your contact point with your depot and emergency services and your security from dangerous and violent passengers.

Ask passengers for a deposit or to pay up front and always settle the payment inside.



5. Know your area

It is important to know your local area for your personal safety and that of your passengers. Driver/passenger disputes are often caused by the driver being unfamiliar with the local area, and this can lead to physical or verbal abuse.

- **Learn the main suburbs, roads and highways**, major landmarks, tourist attractions, hotels and sporting venues in your area. This greatly improves your passenger's journey and reduces the likelihood of dealing with an aggressive person.
- If you are unsure of a destination, ask the passenger for more information, **check your street directory** or call your depot for a destination check **before you start your meter**. A few extra seconds verifying the location and how to get there could save problems with fare discrepancies when you drop off passengers.
- At the start of your shift, **identify areas which may be of higher risk** than others and take extra care in areas associated with excessive alcohol or drug abuse.
- **Never turn down an alley or dead end** - reverse the car in instead so you can more easily drive away if you are in danger.

- **Collect passengers from well lit, well populated areas**, particularly in the early hours of the morning.
- **Know where your secure ranks and taxi totems are**. Secure ranks are monitored by CCTV or security guards and offer greater security for both driver and passenger. Totems alert drivers to waiting passengers at highly used ranks.
- **Know the location of police stations** and other emergency services in your area in case you are in danger.
- **Don't get out of your vehicle in a deserted area**.



6. Driver attitude and behaviour

One of the main causes of arguments and violence between passengers and taxi drivers can actually be the driver's attitude. By remembering the following tips, you can reduce the risk of both physical and verbal assaults, and road accidents.

- **Treat your passengers with dignity and respect** at all times.
- **Accept differences** in culture, language, religion, accents, gender, and speech patterns. Remember, customs and behaviour which are acceptable in Australia may differ from your own beliefs but you should not treat your passengers with any less respect.
- **Speak clearly** and ask passengers to repeat information if you are unsure.
- **Remain calm, polite and professional at all times.**
Don't take insults or offensive language personally. Remember, your response may turn a minor situation into a major conflict.
- **Maintain self control.** Loss of temper affects your judgement, reduces your driving ability and increases your stress levels.
- **Drive safely and avoid road rage.**
Taxi drivers are always in the public eye so a good attitude and service can improve the public's opinion of taxi drivers.

It is also important to be aware of your behaviour around your passengers, especially young females and those who are intoxicated. Keep the points below in mind.

- **It is inappropriate to use sexually explicit language** when speaking with your passengers.
- **You cannot touch or grab your passengers.** Doing so may be deemed physical and/or sexual assault. These are criminal offences for which you can be fined or imprisoned.
- **You can lose your driver accreditation** if you are found guilty of a criminal offence.
- **The security camera records everything that happens in your taxi** and can be used in evidence to support or refute complaints made against you.

Look after yourself

Remember it is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

As a taxi driver, maintaining your personal health is essential to performing well and staying alert in high pressure situations. Below are a few tips to help you on the right track.

- **Eat and drink well.** Try to reduce the amount of fatty, salty and sugary foods you eat and replace them with high fibre, slow release foods which give you energy. Also ensure you drink plenty of water throughout your shift. Remember, your body is like a car, regularly refuel with good quality food and liquids and you will perform better.
- **Exercise regularly.** Use your spare moments during your shift to get out of the taxi, stretch and move around. In between shifts and on your days off it is also important to exercise to keep yourself fit and alert.
- **Get plenty of rest.** Driving while fatigued is one of the main causes of road accidents. Plan your sleep where possible and aim to sleep at least a couple of nights in a row per week. Avoid working too many 12 hour shifts in a row (for example: every night from Thursday to Sunday). Have a power nap during your break for 10-45mins.

This will help keep you alert and give you more energy for the rest of your shift. Watch for the warning signs of fatigue including yawning, poor concentration, and sore eyes.

- **Limit caffeine.** Caffeine will only keep you awake for short periods of time, but not if you are lacking sleep.
- **Always wear a clean, fresh uniform.** Your appearance can affect how your passengers treat you. A professional appearance implies that you take pride in your work and should be treated professionally.

Take pride in your job and the welfare of your passengers.



Know your security equipment and procedures

Your vehicle's emergency and safety equipment is there to help protect you during difficult situations. It is vital that you know how each item works.

1. Security cameras

The majority of taxis in Victoria are fitted with security cameras. A working camera helps deter passengers from committing crimes and can assist police in identifying assailants. Ensure you know how to:

- test that the camera is working
- recognise when the camera is not working
- take a manual photo
- activate the camera in an emergency and 'save' the most recent photos.

If your camera is not working or stops working during your shift, do not drive the taxi. Contact your depot/operator and return the vehicle.

2. M13 alarm

Always press the M13 alarm if you find yourself in a dangerous situation such as an assault or robbery. This button gives you radio priority and a direct line to your depot so you can alert them that a serious situation is taking place. Try to let your depot know where you are, what is happening and give them as much information about the situation as possible.

The alarm will also activate the Global Positioning System (GPS) which tells the depot your exact geographical location. Your depot will also alert police and other taxis in the area that you are in danger and require assistance.

As procedures vary between depots, please ensure you know how to operate the M13 alarm and understand the emergency procedure.

Check your safety equipment before starting your shift.



Know your security equipment and procedures

Remember, make use of your emergency communications systems if you feel unsafe or are in personal danger.

3. Protective screens

Some vehicles are equipped with protective screens, which are positioned between the driver and the passenger to reduce the passenger's ability to cause harm to the driver.

There is an approved model of protective screen on the market which can be installed in most Victorian taxis. If you do have a protective screen fitted to your vehicle ensure it is well maintained so it offers the best possible protection. Ensure it is clean, transparent, securely fitted and there are no cracks.

4. Never drive a taxi with dysfunctional safety equipment.

Perform an inspection of your vehicle at the start of every shift. Check tyres, lights, oil, water and fuel, emergency boot lock release, and ensure all rubbish is removed. Carefully look under and between the seats for dangerous items (including needles) which may have been dumped by previous passengers.

Keep your vehicle presentable and in good working order.



What to do after an incident

Remember - don't clean your taxi after an incident as there may be evidence which the police can use to help with their investigation.

In all emergency and life threatening situations, you should:

- Remain calm and follow instructions.
- Activate your M13 security alarm.
- Observe the assailant and your surroundings.
- Stay in your car until the assailant has left.
- Call 000 immediately if you are hurt.
- Attend the nearest police station to report the incident.
- Always inform your operator of the incident.

Straight after the incident write down a summary to give to your operator and the police with as much detail as you can remember. Try to include:

- how it happened
- when it happened
- where it happened
- what condition you are in (if you were assaulted)
- who the incident was reported to.

If a security camera is fitted, ensure photos have been saved and that it is locked for evidence. Immediately report the incident to police and, if required, a police officer will authorise the camera images to be downloaded.

For additional support following an incident, you should consider contacting:

Victims of Crime Helpline

1800 819 817

8.30am – 5pm, Monday to Friday

(or leave a message outside these hours).

Workers compensation

If you are injured on the job and require medical treatment or time off work, you will need to complete a claim form.

The following checklist outlines what you need to do.

1. Ensure your injury is recorded in the Register of Injuries

Your employer must keep a Register of Injuries at your workplace. This can be filled in by you or someone on your behalf and should be done within 30 days of the injury. If you don't notify your employer you may not be entitled to compensation.

2. Get a medical certificate

If you can't do your normal job you should see a doctor and ask for a WorkCover Certificate of Capacity, similar to a medical certificate. The certificate needs to describe the injury, anticipated time off work and possible alternative duties.

3. If a motor vehicle was involved

If your injury or illness is the result of a motor vehicle accident, you must also report the accident to the police.

4. Obtain a Claim Form

If you want to claim benefits for time off work and/or medical treatment because of a work-related injury or illness, you have to complete a WorkCover Worker's Claim Form, which is available from:

- your employer
- your local Post Office

- WorkSafe Victoria offices
- your authorised Victoria WorkCover Authority (VWA) agent
- WorkCover Advisory Service.

For other entitlements than those mentioned you will need to complete different forms. Please contact the WorkCover Advisory Service for copies.

If you need help completing the Claim Form please contact your employer's VWA agent, or the WorkCover Advisory Service.

5. Give your employer the Claim Form as soon as you can

Complete the Claim Form, attach the WorkCover Certificate(s) of Capacity and give them to your employer as soon as you can. The sooner you submit the claim the sooner a decision can be made on whether your employer is liable for your injury or illness and required to compensate.

For more information

- Contact your authorised Victoria WorkCover Authority agent.
- Contact the WorkCover Advisory Service on (03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089 or email info@workcover.vic.gov.au.

Safety checklist

Listed below is a summary of the main tips and hints covered in this booklet. Refer to this checklist every time you pick up your taxi for a shift.

Answer each question honestly – as your personal safety and that of your passengers are your number one priority.

At the start of your shift, ask yourself:

- Have I inspected my vehicle to ensure all the safety equipment, including the security cameras and alarm system, is working?
- Do I know where my local police station and other emergency services are located?
- Do I know what to do in case of an assault, robbery or fare evasion?
- Do I know how to handle difficult and aggressive passengers without getting angry?
- Am I well rested, alert and aware of my surroundings?
- Am I focussed on providing excellent customer service to my passengers?

If you answer yes to each of these questions

Congratulations, you are a safety-aware driver ready to start your shift. Good luck!

Supporting agencies

Victorian Taxi Directorate

For more information please call the Victorian Taxi Directorate on (03) 9320 4300 or 1800 638 802 (toll-free for country callers only).

Victoria Police

For emergency assistance, please call the Victoria Police on 000. For all other situations, please contact your local station.



For further information please contact the Victorian Taxi Directorate on (03) 9320 4300 or visit www.taxi.vic.gov.au

If you require the assistance of an interpreter for this booklet, please telephone Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) National on 131 450 and ask to be connected to the Victorian Taxi Directorate on (03) 9320 4300.

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