

Taxi Licensing Scrutiny Review

Taxi Driver Safety – Adopted DfT Guidance issued to Taxi Drivers by this Authority

Staying safe: guidance for taxi drivers

As a taxi driver you are dealing with strangers, often in isolated places and carrying cash. Taking people off the streets or from ranks with no knowledge of their home address or telephone number means that if they cause trouble you are especially vulnerable. If you work at night you are likely to have to deal with people who have drunk too much alcohol. All this means you may be at risk of violence. This guide is to help you to think of things that you can do to stay safe.

Cash management

- If you can, drop off cash during your shift so that you carry as little in your car as you can. If you can't, keep your cash hidden from view in a secure box.

Adjustments to your vehicle

- Some drivers of saloon cars fit their car with a screen to protect them from assault. Screens are made from materials that withstand a knife attack or hard body impact, and can be fitted and taken out easily.
- Installing CCTV cameras has been shown to lead to reduced threats and violence against drivers. Signs in the vehicle can highlight the presence of CCTV to passengers. Cameras can be bought or rented, and the cost may be offset by reduced insurance premiums. They can be useful when there is a dispute with a passenger – it is not just your word against theirs.
- Fitting a convex mirror that gives you a full view of the rear of your car will help you to see what a passenger directly behind you is doing.

Carry with you

- A spare key, in case an assailant throws your keys away.
- A mobile phone.
- A note pad and pen to record incidents.
- An emergency card with your name, date of birth, blood group, allergies and a contact number for emergencies.
- An explanation of the fare structure, so that you can explain it to a passenger who feels that you are over-charging them.

If you are linked to a control centre

- Use your radio to tell them where you are going. This will mean the controller has the information, and the passenger will know they do. Alert the controller of any changes along the way.
- Have a pre-arranged code word that you can use if a passenger becomes threatening, so that you can call for help without making the passenger suspicious.
- Some control rooms have GPS and can track the progress of all vehicles. Drivers have a silent button which they can activate in an emergency, which flags up their vehicle on the controller's screen.

Staying safe

- You know that working at night carries most risks of violence, especially as many passengers will have been drinking. Make sure you are not tired – you need to be alert at all times.
- Trust your instinct – you have the right to refuse a passenger if you think they may present a risk.
- If you have a saloon car, control passenger access to the front. Only open the windows enough to speak to people without them being able to reach in. Only let them sit in the front if you wish.
- Communication with the passenger is important. Be polite and pleasant.
- When you travel outside your licensing area, agreeing the fare before you set off can reduce the risks of violence over a fare dispute later, when you may be in an isolated place.
- Be ready to explain the fare structure to a passenger. Many violent incidents arise from fare disputes.
- Make eye contact with the passenger when they get in the car. This helps to establish a relationship with the passenger. It also gives them the message that you could identify them.
- Explain the route you plan to take if you are going a long way round (for example in order to avoid road works) so as to prevent a dispute over the fare.

If you feel threatened

- Try to stay calm. Take slow, deep breaths – this may help to lessen your anxiety.
- Be aware of your own actions and how they may be seen.
- If you can, drive to a brightly lit, busy place as these are often covered by CCTV.
- If you have a purpose built taxi or a saloon car with a screen you are likely to be safer staying in your cab than getting out.
- Do not attempt to run after a passenger who owes you their fare. Your safety is more important than the money.

If you are attacked

- Do not try to fight back – it is most likely to make the violence worse for you.
- Use your horn and lights to attract attention.
- Contact your control room or call 999 to get help.
- Gather as much information about the person as you can (e.g. their clothes, accent).

After an incident

- Write down everything about the incident – a description of the passenger, what they said and did.
- If you did not call them at the time, report all violent incidents to the police. Be prepared to make a witness statement. It may take time, but it may prevent the violence in the future – for you and other drivers.
- When sentencing offenders, courts have been advised to take particularly seriously assaults against people who are providing a public service, especially those who are vulnerable because they work alone at night.
- Bilking is a criminal offence. Report incidents to the police and be prepared to make a statement.
- You may be able to recover the costs of damage to your vehicle through the small claims system.