

Safety Tips for Taxi and Private Hire Drivers



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Introduction

As a licensed driver you are working alone with strangers, often in isolated places and many of you carry 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 in advance and when you are out working.

TOP TIPS

- Always trust your instincts. Refuse a fare if you have any doubts about your safety.
- Minimise the amount of cash you carry: always use contactless payments where you can.
- Remember your training: use your verbal skills and body language to de-escalate any confrontational situations if you can. Try to stay professional and calm, don't raise your voice, keep your hands visible and open, make eye contact and maintain it.
- **Call police immediately** on **999** if you feel in imminent danger.
- Report all non-urgent incidents to police on 101



Adjustments to your vehicle

CCTV

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 installed in Wolverhampton Licensed Vehicles subject to certain conditions please see our website [Taxi CCTV Policy](https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk) (wolverhampton.gov.uk). They can be useful when there is a dispute with a passenger – it is not just your word against theirs.

Driver safety enclosures

Wolverhampton Licensing is currently consulting on allowing of fitting of driver safety enclosures in private hire vehicles, a decision will be made in 2023.

Convex rear view mirrors

Fitting an additional convex rear-view 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.

Vehicle condition

Although it may seem obvious, always ensure your vehicle is in good condition so it won't let you down in an emergency. This is especially important if you share a vehicle. Particularly:

- Tyres have a good tread depth, although the minimum 1.6mm, the deeper your tread, the quicker you will be able to bring your vehicle to a stop, especially in adverse weather. This could be the difference between a near-miss and a road traffic collision
- Ensure all of your lights are working. Good lighting will help you spot any dangers whilst parked or driving
- That you clear the windscreen and windows of ice before driving and make sure they don't mist up
- That all seatbelts are working. In a crash, your passengers are twice as likely to die if they don't wear a seat belt.

Safety measures

Check with your control room which safety measures that they have. Most control rooms will have GPS and can track the progress of all vehicles. Some control room have a silent button which you can activate in an emergency, which flags up their vehicle on the controller's screen.

Have a **pre-arranged code word** that you can use if a passenger becomes threatening, so that you can call for help from your control room without making the passenger suspicious.

Cash management

Do:

- ✓ Consider using **an app** or **card machine** to take payment as this reduces the amount of cash you have in your vehicle.
- ✓ If you can, drop off cash during your shift so that you carry as little in your car as you can.
- ✓ Always keep your cash hidden from view in a secure box and try to hide the cash in several places around the vehicle until you can deposit it securely.
- ✓ Consider **requesting pre-payment** to stay in control.

Don't:

- ✗ Never say to a customer that you have had a busy shift or that business is good. This will alert them to the fact that you may have a lot of cash in the vehicle.

If asked, you could say that you have recently started your shift.



Things to keep in your vehicle

Things to carry with you:

- ✓ A spare vehicle key, in case an assailant throws your keys away
- ✓ A mobile phone, with spare charging cables and a cigarette-lighter USB charger
- ✓ A torch with batteries.
- ✓ A note pad and pen to record incidents
- ✓ An emergency card with your name, date of birth, blood group, allergies and a contact number in case of emergencies
- ✓ A personal attack alarm.

Things not to carry with you:

- ✗ **Do not** carry anything in the passenger compartment of the vehicle that could be used as a weapon, such as wheel jacks or baseball bats, not only could these be used against you by an offender but they could be illegal if the police believe you are carrying it to use as a weapon. If you must carry any tools, ensure that they are securely stored in the boot, preferably in the spare-tyre well.

Accepting a fare

Trust your instinct – you have the right to refuse a passenger if you think they may present a risk. The way a person speaks or dresses might not reflect their behaviour, so always be alert.

Control passenger access to the front of the vehicle.

When you are arriving to collect a fare, follow these steps:

1. Ensure your vehicle doors are locked whilst driving around.
2. Park safely near the passenger.
3. Only open the windows enough to speak to people without them being able to reach in.
4. Identify the passenger's destination (if you are a private hire driver, confirm that this is the correctly booked passenger).
5. Unlock your doors if you are ready to accept a fare.

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.

Communication

- Communication with the passenger is important. Be polite and pleasant.
- 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.

Fare disputes

- When you're travelling into rural areas, 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.
- Explain the route you plan to take if you are going a long way around (for example in order to avoid road works)

so as to prevent a dispute over the fare. If there are multiple routes available, confirm which the passenger would prefer. If you need to change route on the way, advise the customer of the situation and confirm this is acceptable.

Do not attempt to run after a passenger who owes you their fare. **Your safety is more important than the money.**

If a problem arises

Respond calmly

- 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. Non-confrontational verbal and body language may be enough to diffuse a situation.
- Try to stay professional and calm, don't raise your voice, keep your hands visible and open, make eye contact and maintain it.

Make yourself safe

- **If you are in danger, attempt to park and use your horn and lights to attract attention.**
- If you can, drive to a brightly lit, busy place. These are often covered by CCTV.
- If you have a purpose-built taxi with a screen you are likely to be safer staying in your cab than getting out. However, never risk your safety to protect your vehicle.

You must never lock your passengers in the vehicle. You may be arrested and charged with false imprisonment if you do this.

Let someone know

- Contact your control room or call 999 to get help.
- Make use of any safety measures set in place – activate the silent button to notify the control room if your vehicle has one or use the pre-arranged code word when speaking to the control room.

After an incident

- Gather as much information about the person as you can (e.g. their clothes, accent). After an incident and write it down where you can.

Remember its important to report any incidents to the police even if they can't do anything there and then it will be recorded and allow the police to identify the problem and allocate resources in the future.

Stay safe!



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