

[Press release: Don't use the hard shoulder as a naughty step!](#)

The shocking action on the side of the M4 near Bristol was revealed by Highways England today as the company released a list of excuses given to its traffic officers by drivers who had wrongly stopped on motorways.

Other excuses included a family cooking a meal and someone getting out of a taxi to spend a penny.

But CCTV footage reminds drivers why stopping on the hard shoulder also presents a risk. As many people set out on journeys this bank holiday and half term holidays the answer is to be prepared.

[A narrow escape when an out of control car skidded across the motorway.](#)

Simon Jones, Highways England, Regional Director South East said:

We want everyone to get to their destinations safely. But some people put themselves at risk. The advice is simple: Be prepared. Check your vehicle before you set out to avoid unnecessary breakdowns; don't stop except in an emergency; and if you have to stop, make sure you know what to do.

Drivers often think the hard shoulder is a safe place to stop but over 100 people are killed or injured on the hard shoulder every year. We don't want you to become one of those statistics; we want you to stay safe.

Drivers can get advice about [how to check their vehicles](#) before setting out:

If hot weather is forecast drivers are advised to carry plenty of water to drink.

What to do in an emergency

Always try to exit the motorway immediately if your vehicle is damaged or experiences difficulties. If that's not possible, move into the nearest place of relative safety.

On most motorways this will be the hard shoulder. But on a smart motorway there may not always be a hard shoulder, or the hard shoulder may be open to traffic. In these cases you'll see emergency areas spaced regularly along the motorway. Make your way to the nearest one.

You should follow these steps:

- Use an emergency area if you are able to reach one safely. These are

- marked with blue signs featuring an orange SOS telephone symbol on them.
- If you can leave your vehicle safely, contact Highways England via the roadside emergency telephone provided in all emergency areas. We will either send a traffic officer to help you, or set the motorway signs to temporarily clear lane 1 to assist you to rejoin the motorway.
 - If you cannot get to an emergency area but the vehicle can be driven, move it to the hard shoulder (where provided) or as close to the nearside verge or other nearside boundary as possible.
 - In all cases, switch on your hazard warning lights.

If you stop in the nearside lane next to a hard shoulder or verge and feel you are able to exit safely with any occupants, consider exiting your vehicle via the nearside (left hand) door, and wait behind the safety barrier, if there is one and safe to do so.

If it is not possible to get out of your vehicle safely, or there is no other place of relative safety to wait then you should stay in your vehicle with your seat belt on and dial '999' if you have access to a working mobile phone.

For advice on how to drive on motorways, including during an emergency, [visit our guidance page.](#)

Excuses given to Highways England traffic officers by drivers who have wrongly stopped include:

- naughty step – A traffic officer on routine patrol came across a child walking outside of a vehicle walking alongside the motorway on the M4 near Bristol. The car occupants had given the child 'time out' for playing up.
- nice day for a walk – Traffic officers came across an abandoned LGV in a live lane on the M1 near to Northampton Motorway Services. The driver returned 15 minutes later. Apparently he would rather walk into the services rather than use the lorry park.
- hungry – Traffic officers from Dartford found a family congregated on the hard shoulder, cooking a meal as they were hungry.
- festive feast – a crew who had stopped to investigate a car stopped on the hard shoulder of the M6 between with no hazard lights on came across a driver eating a mince pie. She had passed the Stafford South Motorway Services a couple of miles back.
- sleeping dangerously – Traffic officers found the driver of an LGV fast asleep on a verge of the M60. His vehicle was blocking an emergency access route near Cheadle.
- lost – Traffic officers stopped to assist a driver on the hard shoulder of the M1 near Mansfield. She had stopped to look for directions to the crematorium and was ringing her husband for assistance.
- sat nav sagas – A patrol came across a stationary vehicle with no hazard lights on in foggy conditions on the M1 between Chesterfield and Mansfield. The driver walked back up the embankment and got back into the car, which had three passengers, as the traffic officer approached. He had stopped in an emergency area after losing mobile signal for his sat nav.

- nature calls – A minicab which appeared to be a broken down in a live lane on the M25 had in fact stopped for a passenger to relieve their bladder on the exit slip road going towards Staines-upon-Thames.
- potty break – Traffic officers came across a family who had stopped their vehicle on the hard shoulder of the M6 between Oddendale and Penrith so that a child could use a potty.
- text that can't wait – A patrol stopped with a vehicle on the hard shoulder of the M56 near to Chester Motorway Services. The driver was waiting to receive a text and then going to respond.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.