

Tunnel Safety

Whilst the UK has fewer long-distance road tunnels than some other European countries, tunnel safety should be just as important to UK drivers as those elsewhere. A fire in a tunnel, no matter how short the tunnel is, is a serious problem and knowing how to survive is very important.

Vehicle fires in the Mont Blanc and Gotthard tunnels claimed 50 lives between them. Many people died because they wrongly believed they should wait in their vehicles for help rather than getting out of the tunnel immediately.

The AA Motoring Trust is working with a consortium of Europe's leading motoring organisations on a programme of independent tunnel safety inspections. Previous tunnel tests took place in 2000 and from 2002 to 2005. The [latest report \(PDF 362K\)](#) is part of the [European Tunnel Assessment Programme \(EuroTAP\)](#). A table showing all the [European tunnels tested in 2006 \(PDF 505K\)](#) is also available. EuroTAP has launched a major European road tunnel safety information offensive.

The three key messages of the campaign are:

- How to drive safely through road tunnels;
- Safety levels and risk potential of individual tunnels; and
- Europe needs robust common minimum tunnel standards that will guarantee the safety of tunnel users under all circumstances.

UK tunnel tests

UK tunnels have a good safety record, but the failings in the UK tunnel tests reflect the fact that the tunnels were built in an age of lower traffic levels and less demanding standards of safety. Three of the tunnels tested operate two-way traffic with the ever-present risk of a head-on collision. Three tunnels have no separate emergency escape routes.

Since 2000, around 200 road tunnels have been inspected and rated across Europe. UK tunnel operators have responded positively and are investing to improve safety.

- Mersey Queensway - a major investment, including the construction of emergency escape routes has been completed. A new PA (Public Address) system will be commissioned shortly and other ongoing work includes the provision of new variable message signs. The Chairman of Merseytravel said in 2002: "Safety is always our top priority. Merseytravel volunteered to take part in this (EuroTest) survey - we need to deal with the legacy of the way in which the tunnels were built in comparison with modern practices".
- Mersey Kingsway - a new PA system will be commissioned shortly. Future plans include new variable message signs and other work to ensure safety operations conform with European Union Tunnel Directive.
- Blackwall Tunnel (southbound) - work is in hand to commission the almost-completed major improvement work.
- Blackwall Tunnel (northbound) - consultants have reviewed its safety with a view to a major refurbishment. Building work is expected to start in 2006 and be completed by 2008.
- Rotherhithe - in addition to the installation of state-of-the-art emergency communication system, major refurbishment work will start in May 2007.
- Tyne - the public inquiry for a second tunnel has been completed, but it is reported that legal and procedural issues will delay the opening of the second tunnel until 2011.
- Dartford - automatic fire detection systems have been installed, and more work is planned to improve safety operations, and to conform to the proposed European Directive on tunnel safety.

Safety for tunnel users

- Drive safely at the appropriate speed for the conditions, leaving plenty of space between your car and the vehicle in front.
- Don't wait to be told what to do if there is a fire ahead. Pull over to the left, switch off the engine, leave the keys in the ignition and move swiftly away from the fire to the nearest emergency exit, or to the tunnel entrance.

EuroRAP has produced a leaflet giving clear and simple advice on how to drive safely through tunnels and what to do in an emergency.

Download the [Safe in Tunnels leaflet \(PDF 444K\)](#).

A graphic entertaining interactive quiz on tunnel safety can be found on the [ADAC website](#) (your PC will need Active X and Shockwave). The messages contained within the quiz could help save your life, and the lives of your passengers, in the event of a tunnel incident.

For more information, please contact [IAM Motoring Trust Enquiries](#).

Institute of Advanced Motorists
© 2008 IAM
Charity No. 249002
Built on [OneStopCMS](#)