

## Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition 3 Feet for Safety Law FAQ

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In September 2013, the State of California joined other states by approving AB 1371, the [3-foot passing law](#), which requires all motorists to give bicyclists 3 feet of space when passing them. This law goes into effect September 16, 2014. SVBC, alongside our colleagues at [California Bicycle Coalition](#) supported the passage of this bill last summer and we feel it will improve safety on the road for all users. Here are some common questions and answers about this new law and what it means for you.

### **What does the 3-foot bill mean for me?**

As a bicyclist, continue bicycling as normal. As a motorist, you may only pass a bicycle that is proceeding in the same direction on a street if you do so with 3 feet of space between the motor vehicle and the closest part of a bicycle/bicyclist (e.g., handlebar, mirror, elbow – whatever is closest to your car).

### **What are the penalties for violating the 3 feet law?**

If a driver is found to violate this law, they will be fined \$35 plus fees. If a violation results in an injury to a bicyclist, the driver will be fined \$220 plus fees. With court and administrative fees added, the \$35 fine becomes \$233 and the \$220 fine becomes \$959!

### **How is this law enforced?**

If a motorist is seen violating this law, they can be ticketed and fined. This law will be particularly valuable if a bicyclist is hit by a motorist. In this case, it provides a clear basis for establishing liability. However, the most important part of this law is education and defining what a safe passing distance is for all roadway users.

### **What other states have this law?**

[Twenty-four other states](#) in the U.S. have a 3-foot passing law, including our neighbors Nevada, Arizona, and Utah. Pennsylvania has a 4-foot passing law.

### **Does this mean that people on bikes have to stay 3 feet from cars?**

No. This bill specifically references motorists passing bicyclists from behind. A bicyclist who passes a vehicle on the left or right side does not represent the same risk to the driver, and would not be in violation of this law, nor would the driver in this situation (since the bicyclist is passing the car).

### **What if a motorist is unable to allow 3 feet when passing a bicyclist?**

If this situation arises, the law requires that the motorist “slow to a speed that is reasonable and prudent, and may pass only when doing so would not endanger the safety of the operator of the bicycle, taking into account the size and speed of the motor vehicle and bicycle, traffic conditions, weather, visibility, and surface and width of the highway.” SVBC recommends that drivers slow down and wait until they can safely pass the person on the bike at a distance of 3 feet. In most cases, this won’t be more than a few moments.

**Bottom line:** if you are a motorist and you see a bike, slow down and think about how to safely pass with at least 3 feet; don’t try to squeeze past. Respect everyone’s right to the road and to be safe.