

Motor vehicle/driver safety

Motor vehicle accidents account for about one-third of all work-related deaths. In addition to loss of life and injuries, employers bear the costs of work-related motor vehicle incidents in the form of lower productivity and higher operating costs. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recently concluded that motor vehicle crashes cost the nation \$16.4 billion in lost productivity, \$41.1 billion in medical costs and \$26.3 billion in administration and other costs. These figures further break down to show that employers paid \$168,000 for each on-the-job fatality and \$6,900 for each on-the-job crash injury. Such statistics make it clear that employers and employees alike have everything to gain and nothing to lose by reducing the likelihood of motor vehicle incidents among employees. Your attitude toward driver safety, plus the training you provide to employees, can make a difference.

Seat belts, training and safety awareness reduce accidents

You can help reduce motor vehicle incidents among employees by instituting a driver safety awareness program, providing driver training and requiring the wearing of safety belts.

- Driver safety awareness. Drivers must be made aware of safety on a daily basis through a company safe driver campaign. This can be promoted through safe driving literature from supervisors, other management or group instruction.
- Driver training. Don't hire problem drivers. Be sure all new drivers receive safe driver instruction before allowing them to operate a vehicle on company business. In addition, all drivers should receive periodic training in safe driving techniques.
- Safety belts. Requiring use of safety belts must be at the forefront of your safety efforts.

Top management's support is critical

For any safety program to succeed, top management's support is essential! You must state your support for safe driving and deliver a safety policy statement to all employees, even the occasional drivers. With a simple, active program, your business can develop a safe driving culture and control your business operating costs.

Assure that your safe driving program exists in writing. It doesn't have to be a lengthy document or complicated process. Just write it down, copy it and distribute it to all employees.

Components of your safe driving program

Including these items in your safe driving program can reduce losses from motor vehicle accidents.

- Know your employees' driving records.
 - As part of the hiring process, review State Motor Vehicle Records (MVR) for every employee who may drive for the company.
 - The use of a vehicle for nonbusiness needs should be spelled out, as should use of a company vehicle by a spouse. Include a review of the spouse's MVR. If they are to operate the vehicle, at a minimum, they should live in the same household.
 - Ensure that anyone driving a company or private vehicle on company business possesses a valid drivers license.

- Don't permit employees to operate a company vehicle after using alcohol or any illegal substance. Extend the restriction to the operation of a noncompany vehicle on official company business. Various disciplinary actions can be spelled out, from referral to an employee-assistance program to first-offense termination.
- Drivers should wear safety belts when operating any vehicle on company business. All occupants in a company vehicle should also wear safety belts.
- Improving driving skills, knowledge and awareness should be an integral part of the program. All new employees who drive should attend a driver training program. Other drivers should have MVRs reviewed annually, and any found to have problems should be given specialized training.
- Schedule safety inspections of company vehicles twice a year. This process provides insight into how safely the vehicles are being maintained.
- When performance reviews are written, driver safety performance must be included for those employees operating vehicles on company business. It is recommended that good or poor performance in driver safety be rewarded or penalized through the performance review process.
- Require complete incident reports on all vehicle incidents. These reports are designed to record fleet accident history, injury, damage and costs, as well as assist in an incident-review process. They also form the foundation for a database of information that can be used to identify recurring causes of accidents and direct future corrective actions. The completed report should be provided to the immediate supervisor within 24 hours. Notification must be made immediately to the insurance administrator.

- The supervisor should review the incident report with the employee within 10 days of occurrence. This review is an educational process and is not designed to take punitive action. Incidents must be documented, and those drivers needing specialized attention need to be identified and helped.

Cell phone safety

Consider these sobering facts.

- People using a cell phone while driving have a 34 percent higher risk of collision.
- Studies suggest that drivers who use cell phones while driving face an accident risk nearly as great as that of driving drunk.
- The risk of using a hands-free model is just as great as using a hand-held phone.
- Your primary mission while behind the wheel is driving. If a cell phone will distract you, don't make the call until you're parked.

Research indicates cell phones are a distraction

A study conducted by the National Public Services Research Institute for the AAA used a driving simulator to test reaction responses. The test included tuning a car radio, dialing a cell phone and having simple to complex conversations on a cell phone. The conclusions were:

- All forms of cell phone usage lead to significant increases in response times or nonresponse to highway traffic situations.
- Intense or complex conversation leads to the greatest increases in overlooking significant highway traffic conditions and slows response time.
- The distracting effect is similar to that of tuning a radio. The effect of placing calls or engaging in casual conversation was less of a problem, although it did slow response times.
- The distracting effect of cell phone use among drivers over age 50 is two to three times as great as that of younger drivers and encompasses all three aspects of cellular phone use — placing calls and carrying on simple and complex conversations.
- Prior experience with cell phones appears to bear no relationship to the distracting effect of cell phone use.

Eyes on the road and other tips for safe use of a cell phone

If a cell phone must be used while driving, take the following precautions.

- Keep all eyes on the road! Wait until stopped at a traffic light or stop sign or ask a passenger to dial for you.
- Learn to operate the telephone without looking at it.
- Use the cell phone only in the case of an emergency.
- Make calls brief, and be prepared to end calls abruptly.
- Make sure the phone is easily reachable when driving.
- Assess traffic conditions. If traffic flow is heavy, or if busy areas are approaching, wait. Let conditions improve before making that call.
- Avoid arguments or conversation requiring deep thought.
- Stay in the slow lane while talking, and do not pass other vehicles. Keep driving maneuvers simple.
- If you see an emergency situation, pull to the side of the road and call 9-1-1. Be prepared to give the operator specific information such as a highway exit or street names.

Don't let radio, TV, food or clothing interfere with driving

Don't play a radio so loudly that the sounds the vehicle makes or the horns/sirens of other vehicles can't be heard. Failure to hear other vehicles, horns or sirens can lead to a collision that otherwise could have been avoided. It's also illegal to play a radio or other sound system so loudly that it can be heard 50 feet from your vehicle. It is particularly dangerous to wear headphones while driving. It is difficult to realize if the turn signal is still clicking or hear a noise that means something is wrong with the vehicle's engine.

It's dangerous for the driver to watch TV. A motor vehicle should not have a TV in a location where the driver can watch it. Removing a coat or jacket, applying makeup, reading a map or newspaper while driving are also distractions that should be avoided.

It is dangerous to eat or drink while driving. With a hectic schedule, it's tempting to grab a quick lunch on the road, but it's far safer to pull over and park than to eat while driving. Reaction time is slowed if the driver has one hand on the wheel, the other around a sandwich and an eye on a soft drink he or she is worried about spilling.

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