Darkness Descends on the Road to Work



What's at Stake?

Driving at night has unique challenges that aren't found (or aren't found as often) while driving during the day, which include the obvious that the sunlight is not available. In the winter months the days are shorter and many of us drive to work and back home in the dark.

What's the Danger?

Night time driving is only one quarter of the time people spend on the road, yet more than half the vehicle fatalities occur after dark.

It has been reported by the National Highway Traffic Safety administration that people are three times more likely to be in a fatal crash at night than during the day and most vehicle/animal crashes occur at night.

How to Protect Yourself

There are things you can do and common-sense practices to make night time driving safer. The following is a good review of night time safety driving practices.

- Allow yourself more time to get to work. Besides the darkness, there may be the problem of frost, snow, or ice to remove from the windshield.
    - Frost on the road surfaces, especially when combined with the oil which seeped out of the blacktop in the hot weather, makes roads slippery. As does snow and ice.
- Check your driving lights regularly to make sure they are working.
    - Keep them clear of obstructions and clean.
- Turn your headlights on as soon as the lights begins to get dim.
- Use your low beams when you are following another vehicle or when a vehicle approaches from the opposite direction.
    - When you blind the other driver with your high beams, you are endangering yourself.
- Look beyond your own headlights.
    - Use streetlights and the lights of vehicles in front of you to get an idea of what is happening down the road.
- Leave an extra cushion of space around your vehicle at night, to allow more reaction time for yourself and other drivers.
- Impaired drivers are a danger to everyone on the road.

    - Statistics suggest one out of 13 drivers is drunk in the early morning hours.
    - Be alert and give other drivers plenty of space to maneuver.
    - If safe to do so, pull over and call 911/the police if you think another driver is driving under the influence.
- If you have vehicle trouble, pull as far off the road as you can.
    - Warn other drivers with your hazard lights or flashers, headlights, interior lights and flares if you have them.
    - Stay in your car until help arrives.
- Collisions with wildlife can be fatal and animals are more likely to be active in the early morning and early evening.
    - Observe signs warning of animal crossing, slow down if it’s safe to do so, and be extra alert.
    - Use your high beams if there aren’t other vehicles around to help with visibility, but honk instead of flashing your lights if you encounter an animal because the lights may cause the animal to freeze.
    - If an animal runs out in front of your vehicle:
        - Brake and slow down if it’s safe to do so – though it might not be the safest option.
        - Try not to swerve because swerving might send your vehicle out of control and the confused animal may jump in front of your vehicle anyway.

Final Word

Adjust your driving to accommodate traveling at when it’s dark. Leave yourself more time to travel and be alert to dangers on the road.