Defensive Driving – When to be Cautious

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The most dangerous part of an employee's workday is when they're on the road. Just one work-related motor vehicle collision could affect your organization's productivity and finances, but more importantly, the health and future of your employees.

Getting behind the wheel of your car may seem like a commonplace event, but it is likely to be the most dangerous thing you will do all day long. In the U.S., car accidents are the fifth leading cause of death.

Although you can't control the actions of other motorists, you have a great deal of control over how you operate your vehicle. That means you can increase your chances for a safe trip by taking necessary precautions.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Motor vehicle accidents are the major cause of occupational deaths. Most vehicle accidents are the result of driver error or poor operating practices. Drivers assume responsibility for their own safety and that of others on the roadways.

In the United Sates, motor vehicle accidents are the number one cause of death among all workers. Distracted driving and defensive driving are two ways a driver can make significant changes in driving habits. Distracted driving is defined as any non-driving activity a driver engages in that has the potential to distract them from the primary act of driving and increases the risk of crashing. While defensive driving is "…driving to save lives, time, and money, in spite of the conditions around you and the actions of others…" as defined by the National Safety Council.

The leading cause of occupational fatalities is vehicle-related crashes. NSC has been actively working to reduce motor vehicle collisions for more than five decades.

Employers pay significant costs associated with motor vehicle crashes. When employees are involved in traffic incidents, companies are exposed to liability risks and legal expenses, not to mention lost time, decreased productivity and increased insurance and workers' compensation rates.

REVEALING STATS

- Motor vehicle accidents are the most common cause of accidental death in the

United States. They are also the most common cause of workplace deaths, representing about one in four fatal work injuries.
- Every 12 minutes someone dies in a motor vehicle crash, every 10 seconds an injury occurs, and every 5 seconds a crash occurs. And many of these accidents occur during the workday or during the commute to and from work.
- Motor vehicle crashes cost employers $60 billion annually. The average crash costs $16,500, and when a worker has an on-the-job crash that results in an injury, the cost can go as high as $74,000. When a worker dies in a traffic accident, costs can exceed $500,000.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

OSHA SAFE DRIVING TIPS FOR EMPLOYEES

As an employer, it is in your best interest that your employees drive safely. Here are some tips from **OSHA** to help your drivers keep themselves and others safe while on the road.

- Use a seat belt at all times—driver and passenger(s).
- Be well-rested before driving.
- Avoid taking medications that make you drowsy.
- Set a realistic goal for the number of miles that you can drive safely each day.
- If you are impaired by alcohol or any drug, do not drive.
- Avoid distractions, such as adjusting the radio or other controls, eating or drinking, and talking on the phone.
- Continually search the roadway to be alert to situations requiring quick action.
- Stop about every 2 hours for a break. Get out of the vehicle to stretch, take a walk, and get refreshed.
- Avoid aggressive driving by keeping your cool in traffic.
- Be patient and courteous to other drivers.
- Do not take other drivers' actions personally.
- Reduce your stress by planning your route ahead of time (bring the maps and directions), allowing plenty of travel time, and avoiding crowded roadways and busy driving times.

Defensive Driving Tips

When you think of safety hazards and injuries, you probably focus on what goes on during work. But one of the greatest threats to worker safety is in the parking lot. Whether we drive on the job or commute to work by car, defensive driving is a must for all employees at all levels in our company**. Here are some basic rules of defensive driving that you remember and practice:**

- Buckle up for safety.
- Follow traffic rules, signs, and signals.
- Keep your eyes on the road, your hands on the wheel, and your attention on traffic.
- Check your rearview and side mirrors frequently.
- Adjust your speed and driving to changing weather and traffic conditions. Increase your distance between you and the vehicle in front of you.
- Expect the unexpected and be especially alert in heavy traffic for sudden stops, vehicles passing or moving in and out of lanes, road debris, and work zones.
- Keep cool, yield right of way, and don't get into disputes with other drivers.
- Pull over into a safe area to make or receive phone calls.
- Don't drink or take drugs and drive.
- Be extra cautious when your vehicle is in reverse.

- Look ahead at least 10 seconds, 1/4 mile, or to the next intersection or curve.
- Scan any traffic behind you frequently.
- When necessary, reduce your speed.
- Have caution when nearing intersections.
- Be aware of what other drivers do.
- Notify other drivers of what you plan to do.
- Prevent sudden changes in speed or direction.
- Lightly brake when trying to stop on a slippery surface and do not pump ABS brakes. – Do not use cruise control on slippery or icy roads.
- Patiently adjust to the flow of traffic.
- Scan your blind spot before changing lanes.
- Be cognizant of other vehicles changing lanes.
- Have a safe following distance, which should range between 2 and 4 seconds depending on weather and other driving conditions. When analyzing this safe distance, watch the vehicle ahead of you pass a specific mark. Proceed to count "one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two., etc." up to 4.

DRIVING IN THE DARK

It is no surprise that there is a greater risk of accidents at night. In addition, night crashes tend to be more severe. To help keep yourself on the roads when it's dark out, remember these safety tips:

- Start taking precautions as soon as the sun goes down. Dusk is one of the most dangerous times of day on the road.
- Slow down and increase your following distance. Darkness makes judging distances harder.
- Don't overdrive your headlights. You need to be able to slow and stop safely when necessary. If you are driving to fast or your headlights are dim, you may not see obstacles in time to stop or avoid them.
- Take precautions not to be blinded by oncoming headlights. Slow down and shift your eyes momentarily to the right side of road and use the white lines to guide your steering.

THE BENEFITS OF DRIVER SAFETY PROGRAM

Employers have a significant role in reducing vehicle crashes. Through workplace policies and education, employers can help protect their workforce, protect their organizations and, in turn, protect employees' own families and communities.

Implementing a driver safety program, will help your organization keep employees safer and can potentially:

- Decrease risk of motor vehicle collisions and traffic violations
- Minimize exposure to liability risks and legal costs
- Reduce insurance premiums and workers' compensation claims
- Lower vehicle repair bills and replacement expenses
- Protect business operations and brand identity
- Every 7 seconds, someone is injured in a car crash
- Every 15 minutes, someone is killed
- Many of the crashes occur during the work day or the daily commute
- Employers absorb costs associated with these crashes, whether they occur on or off the job
- Motor vehicle crashes are the #1 cause of workplace death

FINAL WORD

Whether you’re driving to your local supplier or on a long road trip interstate, your safety must be a priority. Defensive driving skills take account of road conditions and the actions of others to help you avoid potential hazards. By employing these techniques, starting before you get into your vehicle, you’ll minimize your risk on the road. While you can’t plan for every situation you’ll encounter, the following tips will the minimize risks you face.