



Safety Scene

Get Your Motor Runnin', Head Out on the Highway

by Molly E. Butz with Richard Langton, Bowermaster & Associates

Review these guidelines before getting behind the wheel for company travel.



A variety of people at a component manufacturing facility are required to drive as part of their job responsibilities, whether it's their own vehicle or a vehicle belonging to and insured by the company. From salespeople visiting customers to technicians visiting architects, there are risks involved anytime a person is behind the wheel on company time. Even if it's something as simple as picking up lunch for a meeting, always put safety first. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reported that 43,005 people died in motor vehicle crashes in 2002 and that motor vehicle traffic crashes were the eighth leading cause of death among all ages that year.

In an effort to thwart any perils you might encounter on the road, look over the following **Gear Up Checklist** and **Safe Driving Tips** list. Have all employees who drive as part of their job review the list as well. A good review of sensible driving can mean the difference between life and death on the road. And don't forget risk avoidance. For example, avoiding the accident of the company employee will do wonders to avoid increases (and you could possibly enjoy decreases) in your company automobile and workers' compensation insurance premiums.

Be realistic about your travel time and if you're going to be later than you'd hoped, take a deep breath and accept the delay. You'll be setting a good example for other drivers and keeping yourself safe along the way.

Gear Up for the Road

You can play a key role in reducing accidents by making sure that you and your vehicle are in excellent driving condition. Make a mental note of the items on this **Gear Up Checklist** every time you get behind the wheel.

- Know where you're going, keep easy to read or view directions handy if you're traveling someplace unknown. (see **Case Study** below)
- Give yourself plenty of time to get to your destination.
- Make sure the vehicle is in good working order, including:
 - ✓ Brakes
 - ✓ Taillights
 - ✓ Windshield Wipers
 - ✓ Horn
 - ✓ Turn signals

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at a glance

- ❑ Motor vehicle traffic crashes were the eighth leading cause of death among all ages in 2002.
- ❑ You can play a key role in reducing accidents by making sure that you and your vehicle are in suitable driving condition—before getting behind the wheel.
- ❑ Beware of drowsy driving: 37 percent of drivers surveyed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration admitted to falling asleep at the wheel at some point in their driving career.

Richard says: I know of an accident that took place when the driver, not knowing exactly where he was going, thought he would check his map—while driving. While looking at his map he ran into back of a police car. Luckily no one was seriously injured, but the driver received a ticket and over \$5,000 damage to his company vehicle and even more to the police car. Not to mention the relentless teasing that he received for years following the accident.

case study



Drowsy Driving

Several recent reports have concluded that driving after too little sleep can be just as dangerous as driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Feeling tired behind the wheel can mean slower reaction time, decreased awareness and impaired judgment.

- Thirty-seven percent of drivers surveyed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration admitted to falling asleep at the wheel at some point in their driving career.
- Eight percent admitted doing so in the past six months.
- 60 percent admitted falling asleep while driving on an interstate-type highway with posted speeds of 55 MPH or higher.

Drivers at highest risk include: third shift workers, long distance drivers and people with undiagnosed disorders such as sleep apnea or narcolepsy.

Warning Signs

- Eyes closing or going out of focus
- Yawning, daydreaming
- Feeling sluggish (this could manifest itself in feelings of hunger or thirst)
- Wandering or disconnected thoughts
- Inability to remember driving the last few miles
- Drifting between lanes or onto shoulder
- Abnormal speed, tailgating, or failure to obey traffic signs
- Burning eyes or humming in the ears

Safety Tips

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) estimates that roughly five percent of fatal crashes are "firmly established" as being caused by drowsy driving. However, many experts feel that a far higher percentage of accidents, somewhere between 20 and 40 percent, are actually fatigue related crashes. Here are just a few ways to help ensure you are alert behind the wheel:

- Maintain a regular sleep schedule that allows adequate rest.
- At first signs of fatigue, get off the road. Take a short nap in a well-lit area. Do not simply stop on the side of the road.
- Avoid driving between 12 a.m. and 6 a.m.
- If you're going on a long trip:
 - Share driving responsibilities with a companion.
 - Begin the trip early in the day.
 - Keep the temperature cool in the car.
 - Stop every 100 miles or two hours to get out of the car and walk around; exercise helps to combat fatigue.
 - Stop for light meals and snacks.

[SOURCE: National Safety Council's *Drowsy Driving Fact Sheet* & Insurance Corporation of British Columbia's *Waking up to Drowsy Driving Info Update Road Safety PDFs*.]

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Richard says: A company I have insured for over ten years had an accident in which the driver had just stopped for lunch and was heading back to work with a hamburger and fries on his lap. He made a left turn and his fries went on the floor. After muttering a few choice words, he reached down to pick up the fallen fries. When he looked back to the road, traffic had stopped but he hadn't. He rear-ended the car in front of him and his hamburger hit the windshield. Moral of this story is: **Keep your eyes on the road and your fries on hold.**

case study

Safety Scene

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- ✓ Back-up lights
- ✓ Headlights
- ✓ Tires (Tread Depth and Proper Filling)
- ✓ Brake Lights
- ✓ Seatbelts
- Be sure to get plenty of sleep (see sidebar on page 17).
- NEVER drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Keep outside distractions to a minimum, including:
 - ✓ Eating and/or drinking (see **Case Study** above)
 - ✓ Loud music
 - ✓ Cell phones
- Adjust mirrors and seat before you begin.

10 Tips for Safer Driving

Although they may seem like common sense, these tips for safe driving are a great refresher to keep you and your employees safe on the road.

- Observe speed limits.
- Obey traffic signs and signals.
- Pass other vehicles on the left.
- Yield to drivers who have the right of way.
- Avoid tailgating, give each car plenty of room.
- Don't insist on the right-of-way if the other driver will not yield to it.
- Dim your lights for oncoming cars and those ahead.
- Be aware of what's happening several vehicle lengths ahead and behind you.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Reduce your speed on poor, wet and snowy roadways.

Regardless of how careful or how skilled you may be as a driver, there are many factors that can threaten your safety, from other drivers to poor road conditions. Driving defensively means not only taking responsibility for yourself and your actions but also keeping an eye on the other guy.

The Insurance Corporation of British Columbia may have said it best: "Be realistic about your travel time and if you're going to be later than you'd hoped, take a deep breath and accept the delay." You'll be setting a good example for other drivers and keeping yourself safe along the way. Make it a point to arrive at your destination with as little aggravation as possible! **SBC**

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email wtca@woodtruss.com, or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at www.wtcatko.com.

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