



#26 - Safe Driving

A guide to assist in training employees.

provided by:

Kansas Municipal Insurance Trust

Safe Driving

Meeting Objectives

To review the factors that make driving the leading cause of accidents/accidental deaths and provide an overview of the importance of using safety belts, motorcycle helmets, and the safe driving skills that prevent accidents in motor vehicles. The result should be greater use of safety belts and motorcycle helmets and more awareness of driving as a skill that requires constant alertness and attention.

Introduction/Overview

More people are killed or injured in motor vehicle accidents than in any other way, both on and off the job. Here are a few statistics:

- Motor vehicle accidents are the number one cause of all accidental deaths, accounting for nearly half of them.
- There were 40,300 motor vehicle deaths in 1992.
- There were 2,200,000 disabling injuries caused by motor vehicles in 1992.
- There were 60.6 billion dollars' worth of lost wages and productivity due to motor vehicle deaths and injuries in 1992.

We can assume that most of the people killed or injured in motor vehicle accidents knew how to drive, yet that did not prevent the worst from happening. We hope that by highlighting some of the most common causes of accidents—and some of the ways to prevent them—we can help you stay safe behind the wheel.

General Hazards

Driving can present all kinds of hazards: other vehicles, poor road surfaces, poor visibility, and stationary objects such as trees or posts. But the greatest potential hazard of all is the driver. Improper driving causes more than half of fatal accidents and more than two-thirds of accidents that cause injuries. Speeding is the worst culprit.

Other types of improper driving that often lead to accidents:

- Ignoring traffic signs and signals.
- Following too close to another vehicle.
- Driving in the wrong lane.
- Failing to yield to another vehicle.



There are three other factors that commonly cause accidents:

1. Drinking—About half of all fatal accidents involve drivers who have been drinking alcohol.
2. Night—More than half of motor vehicle deaths occur in accidents that happen after dark.
3. Seat Belts—If you do have an accident, wearing a seat belt is considered 45% effective in preventing death and 50% effective in preventing moderate to critical injuries.

Regulations

Currently, there are no specific regulations covering the driving of cars, trucks, and other on-road vehicles (there are regulations covering forklifts and other powered industrial trucks). It makes sense to require employees to follow safe driving practices like wearing seat belts when driving or riding in motor vehicles on city business. Although there are no specific training requirements for driving, following safe practices can reduce accidents and even save lives.

Protection Against Hazards

Let's look at what you can do to prevent accidents.

First and foremost: buckle up. In many states, wearing seat belts is the law. It is common sense at any time and place. Be sure to use seat belts even for the shortest and slowest trips. Serious and even fatal injuries can occur at speeds under 40 miles an hour.



For the greatest protection, place your shoulder belt across your collarbone and over your shoulder. Your lap belt should be snug and low across the hips. Then, if there is an accident, you will not get thrown into the windshield or steering wheel, or out of the car.

You do not need instructions for wearing a motorcycle helmet. Just do it. Even when it is not legally required, it is the best way to keep your head.

Driving is a skill. Do not take it for granted or decide that things like speed limits and red lights are only there for other people. People do sometimes get away with ignoring the law and good sense, but if you push the law of averages, dangerous driving will catch up with you.

A good driver is a defensive driver, always alert and aware when behind the wheel. Let's look at what that means in terms of specific driving rules and techniques.

- Obey the speed limit. Speed limits are considered the safest top speed for a particular road. Obey them even if you do not agree with them. It cannot only save lives, but your driver's license. Many states suspend speeders' licenses, plus impose heavy fines.
- Obey traffic signs and signals. Jumping stop lights and signs is a major cause of accidents—especially since the driver across the intersection may be jumping the light, too. Stop at red lights and stop signs. And remember: A yellow light does not mean go. It means stop unless you are already in the intersection.
- Always slow down and look both ways before you go, even if the light is green or you are allowed to turn right on red. Pay attention to other traffic signs, including notices to yield, or construction or road hazards ahead.
- Do not tailgate. The rule is to stay at least two seconds behind the vehicle in front of you. When the car in front of you passes something stationary like a telephone pole, count "one thousand one, one thousand two." If you get to the pole before "one thousand two," you're following too closely.
- Pass on the left only. That is true on a highway as well as other roads. And before you pass, check to make sure nothing is coming from the other direction or behind you. Then signal, pass, and signal again as you move back to your regular lane.
- Yield right of way. Always yield when the other driver has the right of way, or if he/she is determined to take it. At a four-way stop, take your turn before going into the intersection. When you are going onto a highway from an entrance ramp, check the traffic and yield to those vehicles on the highway. They are going faster than you and might not be able to slow enough to let you in.
- Do not overload a vehicle. A vehicle that is overloaded with people or weight is likely to have less stopping ability. Overloading can also make tires overheat and blow out. An overloaded vehicle can block the driver's rear and side vision. In addition, if you put too many people in a vehicle, there will not be enough safety belts to go around.

- Do not drink and drive. Everyone knows that, but we also know that people still do it. The same goes for drug use. Alcohol and drugs:

- Slow your reactions
- Blur your vision
- Reduce your ability to judge distance
- Impair your judgment
- Make you think you are doing great when you are not.



Do not drive for at least an hour after you have had a drink. Even better, do not drive at all. If you are in a group, have a designated nondrinker who will be able to get you all home safely.

- Be especially cautious at night. You cannot see as well at night, and you are likely to be tired, which may reduce your attention or your reaction time. For safe night driving:
 - Let your eyes adjust to the dark when you leave a building.
 - Make sure your headlights are clean and working properly—and turn them on as soon as it starts to get dark.
 - Allow more distance between you and the car in front than during the day.
 - Do not use your high beams if there is a car in front of you or coming from the other direction.
 - Stop at a rest area when you are tired. Walk around and get some fresh air. Have a cup of coffee.
 - Try not to stop on the side of the road, especially on curves. Other drivers may not see you or may not realize you are not moving. If you have to stop, use flares or flashers.

Bad Weather

Driving always requires your full attention but even more so in bad weather when road conditions can change and other drivers are more likely to make stupid or careless mistakes.

Rain, even a light shower, makes roads slick, so slow down. Stay four seconds behind the driver in front because you may not be able to stop as fast. In addition:



- Use wipers, defroster, and headlights to improve visibility.
- Be careful of large puddles that can make your brakes less effective. Drive through slowly, tapping your left foot on the brake. Test the brakes once you are through the puddle, making sure the driver in back is not so close he/she will hit you.
- Avoid hydroplaning. This is when you lose control because your tires are driving on water instead of on the road. Drive slowly and smoothly, avoiding puddles. If you do lose control, take your foot off the gas. Do not brake suddenly.

Snow and ice terrify many drivers causing them to drive poorly. These conditions do require more caution. Follow these guidelines:

- Wear sunglasses to reduce glare.
- Clear snow off front and back windshields, side windows, hood, roof, and lights.
- Use your wipers and defroster.
- Drive and brake slowly and stay further behind the car in front of you.
- Watch out for ice, especially on bridges and in shady spots.
- Turn into a skid and take your foot off the gas. Do not brake.



Fog also causes accidents. Slow down gradually as you enter fog so you do not hit someone and so that the cars behind you do not hit you. Put your headlights on low beam and use your wipers and defroster. Avoid passing. If you cannot see well enough to drive, pull off the road, leaving flashers and lights on.

Safety Procedures

There are numerous other safety procedures and techniques that will help you stay safe on the road. Traffic is so heavy these days and poor roads and road construction are common. There is a lot to pay attention to. Make defensive driving a way of life.

- Keep your eyes on the other drivers and expect them to do the unexpected.
- Keep your eyes on the road and be prepared to react quickly. Watch out for potholes, debris, pedestrians, bicycles, and animals.
- Look for changes in traffic and road conditions. Slow down when you see a lot of brake lights and expect to act quickly.
- Keep a little distance behind the car in front of you in heavy traffic so that there is somewhere for you to go if an accident occurs.
- Be especially cautious in heavy traffic. There is always the possibility of a disabled car, passing cars, or drivers cutting in and out of lanes trying to get to an exit or to move more quickly through traffic. Be prepared to move or stop suddenly.
- Never pass a stopped school bus. Be on the lookout for children anywhere near a stopped or moving bus.
- Be especially cautious when driving a strange vehicle. Take it slow until you get used to the handling, especially in rain or wind.
- Check rear and side mirrors constantly. Learn your mirrors' blind spots so you know when and where to turn your head to check.
- Keep your mind on your driving, your eyes on the road, and your hands on the wheel. Driving requires all your physical and mental attention. Do not daydream or get too involved in conversation.

Maintenance

In addition to safe driving, you need a safe car. To maintain your vehicle safety:

- Have your oil changed at least as often as your owner's manual suggests and get regular tune-ups.
- Make sure belts and wires are in good condition.
- Check to make sure lights and signals work.
- Keep windshield washer fluid in the car and change wiper blades when they streak your windshield.
- Add antifreeze in winter, coolant in summer.
- Check that the tire tread is good and, when your tires are cold, check tire pressure to keep tires properly inflated.
- Find the cause of any performance problems or unexplained noises promptly.



Wrap-Up

You know how to drive safely, but we all need reminders sometimes about how and why to do it. More people are killed and injured in road accidents than any other way, and most of them knew how to drive safely. Either they did not use their knowledge or the other driver did not. In many cases, careless driving turns fatal because a safety belt was not used.

We all want to hold onto our lives and licenses, to keep our cars in good shape, and our insurance rates down. And certainly, no one wants to have someone else's death or injury on his/her conscience. So pay attention to how you drive. Put your safety sense in high gear every time you get behind the wheel. And always buckle up!



Sample Handout—

Safe Driving Do's and Don't's Checklist

DO:

- Always wear a seat belt.
- Be a defensive driver.
- Keep your eyes on the road, your mind on driving, and your hands on the wheel.
- Obey the speed limits.
- Obey traffic signs and signals.
- Yield the right of way.
- Drive especially cautiously at night and in bad weather.
- Use headlights and keep more distance between other cars at night.
- Use lights, wipers, and defrosters in rain, snow, and sudden fog.
- Watch out for puddles, icy patches, and sudden fog.
- Slow gradually as you enter a foggy area.
- Check rear and side mirrors constantly for oncoming traffic.
- Pass on the left only.
- Keep an eye out for changes in road and traffic conditions, pedestrians, bicycles, and animals.
- Dim your lights for oncoming traffic.
- Maintain your car according to its manual.
- Expect the unexpected and the worst from other drivers.

DON'T:

- Drive if you have been drinking or using drugs.
- Tailgate: Stay at least two seconds behind the vehicle in front—more in bad weather.
- Stop on the road at night unless absolutely necessary; use lights and flashers.
- Drive through large puddles if you can avoid it. If you can't, drive slowly, tapping the brake and checking brakes when through.
- Brake in a skid; drive into it.
- Pass a stopped school bus.
- Talk on your cell phone.