



Driving Safely: The Need for (Less) Speed

Transportation accidents kill more workers than any other work-related hazard—and it doesn't matter what industry you're in.

By Jennifer Busick

You probably have workers who are on the road while they're on the clock. What are the hazards of driving on the job? While some factors (such as equipment safety and roadway conditions) can affect crash rates, driving behaviors are far more important.

Unsafe driving is a significant hazard for workers on the job. A study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that four unsafe driving behaviors significantly increased

crash risks: speeding, drowsy driving, looking away from the road, and aggressive driving. Let's take a closer look at these four dangers—and what employers and their workers can do to curtail them.

1. Workers Are Speeding Up

Speed is deadly. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), excessive speed is involved in 31 percent of the nation's fatal crashes. But rather than slowing down, Americans are driving ever faster, NHTSA's research revealed.

From 2007 to 2009, the percentage of drivers speeding on U.S. highways increased from 48.3 percent to 71.1 percent, with 45 percent of drivers exceeding the speed limit by at least 5 mph (up from 28 percent in 2007).

Workers who are on the clock and driving company vehicles are part of this trend, too. What can employers do to slow them down?

Although "speeding" is generally defined as "exceeding the speed limit," that's not the only time that employees may be driving too fast. Make sure workers know they're driving too fast if they:

- *Drive too fast for conditions.* Some road conditions—fog, heavy rain, ice, and smoke, for example—warrant reducing speed. Any time visibility is reduced or road conditions are slick, workers need to slow down.
- *Tailgate.* Drivers should leave 3 seconds' distance between their vehicle and the vehicle in front when driving below highway speeds in ideal conditions. At highway speed, or when conditions are poor (reduced visibility or slippery road conditions), they should leave 4 to 5 seconds' distance. In extremely dangerous conditions—snow and ice, for example—7 to 8 seconds' following distance is needed.

Employers Can Slow Them Down

The single most important thing you can do to discourage employees from driving too fast on the clock is to make sure they have adequate time to get where they're going.

Make sure workers know they are not expected to exceed any posted speed limit as a part of their job and are not required to drive faster than conditions safely permit. This may mean adjusting their schedules so they have sufficient travel time.

You should also have a written policy in place covering speeding for workers who drive on the clock.

Workers need to know that:

- They must pay their own speeding tickets. Believe it or not, workers do not assume this. Put it in writing.
- They must report speeding tickets to you. If workers receive speeding tickets while on the clock, require them to report it. It will affect your insurance and your overall risk of a work-related crash, so it's important that you know about workers who habitually drive too fast. You can get this information in other ways, of course, but it should also be your policy to require workers to 'fess up on their own.
- You will be requesting reports from your insurer. Speeding tickets should be reported to your insurer, but your insurer may or may not automatically report them to you. Make a habit of asking for this information on a regular basis.
- Speeding is subject to your disciplinary policy.

"MAKE SURE WORKERS KNOW THEY ARE NOT EXPECTED TO EXCEED ANY POSTED SPEED LIMIT."

2. Asleep at the Wheel

According to a survey by the National Sleep Foundation, more than half of adults reported driving while drowsy in the past year, with almost a third reporting that they do so at least once per month. Are your employees among them?

According to the National Sleep Foundation, commercial truck drivers, young people, and shift workers are some of the groups at the highest risk of driving while drowsy. So what can you do to ensure that your

employees don't become a part of those statistics?

Are You Getting Sleepy?

The first step to staying safe on the road is to recognize the signs of drowsiness. Drivers that experience these signs should stop and rest to avoid putting themselves and others at risk:

- Difficulty focusing
- Heavy eyelids
- Daydreaming
- Missing exits or traffic signs
- Trouble keeping their heads up
- Drifting out of the correct lane or hitting a shoulder rumble strip
- Yawning repeatedly or rubbing eyes

Restoring Alertness

When it comes to preventing behind-the-wheel drowsiness, there's no substitute for a good night's sleep. However, if drivers find themselves becoming sleepy on the road, stopping for a short nap may help. For optimal effectiveness, naps shouldn't last more than 20 minutes; any longer than that can cause grogginess. If stopping to rest isn't possible, consuming caffeine can temporarily increase alertness.

If you're an employer whose workers drive on the job, make sure you have a safety policy in place that addresses drowsy driving and train workers in the hazards of behind-the-wheel fatigue. Advise workers to avoid driving while drowsy and to follow the interventions described above, emphasizing that arriving safely is more important than arriving quickly. In addition, make sure employees who drive on the job know to avoid substances that can increase drowsiness, such as alcohol and certain medications.

If your employees are commercial motor carriers, the Department of Transportation has Hours of Service (HOS) rules to ensure that drivers take adequate periods of rest. The specifics of these rules depend on whether the driver is transporting passengers or property, but all commercial motor carriers must break up their periods

of driving time with specified minimum amounts of off-duty time and must not exceed total driving-time limits in a 7- or 8-day period.

3. Discourage Distracted Driving

By now, your drivers should know: Don't text and drive. Texting is more dangerous than drunk driving. Put the phone away when you're behind the wheel. But even if the "Don't text while you're driving" message has sunk in, it may not be enough to keep your drivers focused on the road. It seems we're inventing new ways to distract ourselves almost daily.

Drivers who take their eyes off the road for more than 2 seconds for any reason—not just texting—double their odds of a crash. Drivers should keep their eyes on the road and not on their cell phone, radio, climate controls, passengers, or the scenery.

Warn your drivers about these new driving-related distractions.

Driver 'Selfies'

Yes, taking self-portraits with cell phone cameras is a trend, especially among younger drivers, motorcycle riders, and even pilots. ("Selfie" was actually the Oxford Dictionary's Word of the Year for 2013. That's how common this type of photography has become.) And they're not necessarily snapping these shots while the vehicle is stopped. Worse, these aren't always still photos—you can find 6-second Vine videos and 15-second Twitter videos of drivers operating their vehicles, too. There's no hard data yet on how dangerous the practice may be, but do you really need it?

Web Surfing

Even the most antiquated flip phone can send text messages and take pictures, but the latest and greatest handheld phones—smartphones—offer an even broader range of dumb things to do while driving.

Thanks to smartphones, Web surfing while driving is on the rise,

PRACTICAL TIPS

according to an annual survey conducted by State Farm Insurance. This practice affects even older drivers who might be less prone to snap a selfie. Older drivers trying to get in on the latest trends may need reminding: The time to find out whether tickets are still available for that Black Sabbath reunion tour is before or after you get out of the car.

Voice-Controlled 'Infotainment' Systems

Automakers are increasingly making information and entertainment apps like Google, Siri, Facebook, and Pandora available to drivers using voice-activated technology.

Automakers claim the technology is seamless, intuitive, and safe, but some transportation experts, including former U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, disagree. A study published by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety in 2013 found that this technology creates a level of driver impairment comparable to drunk driving. But more than half of all new cars are expected to have this technology by 2019.

Discourage Distracted Driving

The NHTSA believes that a successful distracted driving prevention strategy involves putting a consistent message in front of employees. In particular:

Tell workers to quit these behaviors. Convincing drivers to put down devices while driving is key to ending distracted driving. Drivers simply cannot pay full attention to the road while using these devices or engaging in other distracting activities.

Use messages that work. The NHTSA has identified three messages it says are most likely to lead to action.

- **Deadly behavior.** Thousands of people die and hundreds of thousands of injuries occur because people were not paying attention to the road. Whatever it is can wait. The chance of causing a crash that could ruin lives is just too great.
- **Young drivers are at great risk.** Drivers under 20 years old are most

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at risk. Their lack of experience can contribute to critical misjudgments if they become distracted, yet they text more than other age groups.

- **Everyone has a role.** Everyone has a stake in the problem and everyone is part of the solution. Drivers must be good role models for their peers, their children, and their communities and should insist that others they ride with do the same.

4. Driven to Aggression

There are lots of drivers on the roads who are just plain rude. They tailgate, they forget to use their turn signals, and they race through a yellow light when they really should have stopped. Sometimes drivers are worse than rude—they are downright dangerous. Aggressive driving can increase crash risk; encourage your drivers to keep their cool and to react appropriately to aggressive drivers they may encounter so that nobody is driven to destruction.

Aggressive driving behaviors include tailgating, abrupt lane changes, rude hand gestures, failing to yield the right-of-way, flashing high beams, cutting another driver off, and speeding. Offer your drivers the following tips to reduce aggressive driving.

Don't Be Aggressive

Aggressive drivers more than double their risk of crashing. Reduce your

stress and increase your safety by:

- Giving yourself plenty of time to reach your destination,
- Planning your route in advance, *and*
- Altering your schedule or route to avoid busy roads.

Specific aggressive driving situations to avoid include:

- *Cutting off other drivers.* This is dangerous, especially if you cut off a big semitrailer. After you pass a semitrailer, make sure you can see the cab of the truck in your rear-view mirror before reentering the right lane. Maintain your speed. Do not slow down once you are in front of the truck.
- *Using passing lanes properly.* A passing lane is supposed to be just that. If you are in the passing lane, don't stay there if you are driving more slowly than others and blocking the lane. Move back to the right-hand lane where the traffic is going at a slower speed.

React Appropriately to Other Aggressive Drivers

Sometimes, you're the aggressive driver; other times, you may encounter an aggressive driver. How should you respond in order to defuse potential "road rage" situations and avoid crashes?

- Drive courteously but defensively.
- Be prepared if you have to take emergency action to avoid a collision.
- Don't respond to screaming or rude signals.
- Go with the flow of traffic.
- If a vehicle cuts you off, drop back and let it go on ahead.

If employers are proactive in addressing these issues with employees who spend time on the road, they can help ensure everyone gets where they need to go—safely. **SD**

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