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Specialty Human Services

Take It Easy: Driver Safety

According to the CDC's [Key Injury and Violence Data](), motor vehicle accidents have long been the leading cause of death for Americans aged 1 to 44, and they remain a leading cause of death for all age groups after accounting for health conditions such as heart disease and cancer. Roadway accidents are also the top cause of deaths in the workplace. For those who drive often, driving might feel relatively safe and mundane, and driving carefully might feel like second nature. But the prevalence of crashes resulting in injuries and fatalities makes it clear that safer driving should be top-of-mind for everyone.

Employers Set Expectations for Distraction-Free Driving

Distracted driving is a primary cause of car crashes and results in many injuries and deaths across the US each year. The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration]() reported that in 2017, 9% of fatal roadway accidents were related to distracted driving, and of those fatal distraction-affected crashes, 14% involved cell phone use as the distraction. Reducing distracted driving by staff should be a core component of any employer's driver safety program.

To foster an organizational culture conducive to distraction-free driving, employers can make a bold move to show their staff that safety is the top priority. Consider instituting an organization-wide policy about distraction-free driving during work hours. Ask employees to pledge to drive—during work and even to-and-from work—without using phones, hands-free devices, and other technologies. Show employees safer alternatives to distracted driving—for example, pulling over at a rest stop to take a scheduled phone call or to eat a snack—so they have options to feel productive and manage job-related stressors while remaining safe.

Educate employees about the three main types of distraction:
- Visual: taking your eyes off the road
- Manual: taking your hands off the wheel
- Cognitive: taking your mind off driving

The [CDC reports]() that "texting while driving is especially dangerous because it combines all three types of distraction. When you send or read a text message, you take your eyes off the road for about five seconds, long enough to cover the length of a football field while driving at 55 mph." Even hands-free devices are cognitive distractions and are involved in roadway accidents.

Passengers are another risk factor for distracted driving. According to the [AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety](), "Passengers are one of the most frequently reported causes of distraction, with young children being four times more distracting than adults…" Employers with staff responsible for driving passengers should ensure that passengers are educated about their own responsibility to avoid distracting the driver. Or, if staff drivers are chauf-

feuring children, consider enacting a policy that requires one or more adult staff members to accompany a staff driver in order to manage the young passengers.

Establishing a Safe Driving Program

Managing distracted driving is just one component of driver safety. Employers should strive to establish a comprehensive driver safety program that encompasses management controls, safety policies, driver qualification and training, fleet vehicle selection and maintenance, and more. Explore the **driver safety program guidelines** recommended by Great American Insurance Group, and find additional driver safety resources in Great American Insurance Group's **Driver Safety Library**, which offers information about fleet operations, defensive driving, safety in 15-passenger vans, and more.

Employers can also start revamping their driver safety practices by reviewing the tenets below.

Systematically Screen Drivers

Before an employer allows any employee or volunteer to drive on behalf of the organization, each driver candidate should be screened thoroughly to ensure that the best available drivers are selected. Establish a **driver qualification program** as recommended by Great American Insurance Group, and be sure to conduct an **on-the-road evaluation** before any new hire begins their driving duties.

Reduce Drowsy Driving

The US Department of Transportation maintains **Hours of Service Regulations** that limit the amount of time staff can stay behind the wheel between breaks and time off duty. Employers whose staff members drive often or in long shifts should consider setting drive time policies as well, to prevent drowsy driving. Driving while tired is as dangerous as driving drunk. Some drowsy drivers try to stay awake by listening to loud music, blasting cold air conditioning, or opening a window to feel the breeze, but research shows that none of these quick fixes actually work. When feeling sleepy, the only real solution is to pull over and take a short nap. It's safer and more productive for employers to prevent drowsy driving in the first place.

Fortify Your Fleet

Selecting appropriate vehicles and proactively maintaining those vehicles is key to executing programs and operations while ensuring driver safety. Take advantage of fleet management resources available from Great American Insurance Group, including a **Pre- and Post-Trip Vehicle Condition Report**, and guidelines for a **Fleet Accident Review Board** and **Driver Accident Review**. Also be sure to manage risk associated with **driver-owned vehicles** used for business purposes, including securing the right **insurance coverage**. Managing a fleet is no small task, so don't forget the little things, like supplying fleet vehicles with **emergency kits** in case drivers experience a crash, a breakdown, wild weather, or other roadway hazards.

Practice Proven Safety Protocols

Educate staff members and empower them to practice proven safety protocols like these when driving for work:

Banish Backing Up

Kids and Cars estimate that at least fifty children are backed over by vehicles every week. Some drivers can reduce back-up accidents by relying on a rear-view camera or back-up sensor installed in the vehicle, but these tech enhancements still offer a limited view of what's going on behind a vehicle. Instead of encouraging backing up

while using cameras or sensors, consider banishing backing up completely. In most driving scenarios, backing up can be completely avoided. If backing up is absolutely necessary, then require staff drivers to use a spotter while backing up, walk around the vehicle to inspect the surrounding area before backing up, and remain aware of blind spots.

Countdown at Intersections

Before entering an intersection, drivers should count to three while scanning the entire intersection with their eyes. Whether approaching the intersection while driving or approaching after stopping at a stoplight or stop sign, drivers should count to three and look around the intersection for hazards before driving their vehicles into the intersection. This simple habit can prevent t-bone crashes, which commonly occur when a driver fails to stop at a sign or traffic light and accidentally drives into the side of another vehicle crossing the intersection.

Stop with Space

Whenever a driver comes to a stop behind another vehicle, they should leave space between their stopped car and the stopped vehicle in front of them. A driver should leave at least the length of their own vehicle between them and the car in front of them, creating an open escape route should the car in front of the driver break down. In case the driver gets rear-ended, the space in front of them will also provide a buffer, reducing the risk of the driver's car being pushed into the stopped vehicle in front of them. Practicing this easy tip will help fleet drivers avoid getting stuck in traffic or being crushed in the middle of multiple-vehicle pile-ups.

Regulate Emotions and Road Rage

Do not allow staff members to drive when feeling strong emotions like anger, anxiety, sadness, or extreme excitability. Encourage staff drivers to be honest if they might be stressed or otherwise at risk for emotionally reactive driving, and try to have backup drivers on-call in case such a situation arises. Driving while emotionally charged could cause a driver to make more errors or lose control of the vehicle if they can't fully focus on the roadway environment. Emotional drivers are also at greater risk of reacting impulsively and expressing their feelings aggressively. Help staff drivers recognize that road rage is real; in 2019, CNN reported that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found a 500% increase in fatal crashes related to aggressive driving between 2006 and 2015. The same CNN article also reported results from a 2016 poll conducted by AAA's Foundation for Traffic Safety. The poll showed that most American drivers are guilty of road rage at least once per year, with an estimated 51% of American drivers tailgating on purpose, 24% of drivers blocking other cars from changing lanes, 12% of drivers intentionally cutting off other drivers, and 3% of drivers—6 million people—ramming another car on purpose.

Prioritize Personal Health

Professional drivers recognize how much personal health can affect driving performance. For staff members whose jobs require driving, share health and wellness resources and information to help these individuals maintain healthy lifestyles. Good health will help drivers manage hunger, thirst, tiredness, and other distractions and discomfort they might face on the road.