



SAFETY TALKS:

Stay Alert Driving After Dark

In our 24/7 work-environment, not everyone works during daylight hours. In the fall and winter, when darkness comes early, even day-shift workers may be commuting in the dark. Driving at night poses many challenges. Depth perception, color recognition and peripheral vision can be compromised, and the glare from headlights can temporarily blind a driver.

Vehicle Maintenance

To help combat these challenges, the National Safety Council recommends drivers keep their headlights properly aligned and cleaned. Windshields should also be clean and free from film, with washer fluid filled and wiper blades in good condition. Drivers should keep dashboard lights dim and avoid looking at oncoming headlights and use antireflective lenses if glasses are worn.

Older Drivers

For older drivers, night vision can be problematic because of cataracts, degenerative eye diseases and the ageing process. "A 50-year-old driver may need twice as much light to see as well as a 30-year-old driver," NSC notes. For workers who are 60-years-old and older, the American Optometric Association (AOA) recommends an annual vision exam, driving slower and limiting driving to daytime hours when possible. AOA also advises older drivers to check with their doctor about potential side effects of any prescription medication they are taking.

Rush Hour

During fall and winter, the evening rush hour (4:00pm – 7:00pm) is not only crowded, but occurs as the sun is setting and into dark hours. To help get home safe, NSC encourages drivers to stay calm and don't be impatient. Remain in your own lane, stay alert, and refrain from eating, drinking, or talking on your cell phone. Even hands-free devices distract your mind from the all-important task of driving safely.

Drowsy Driving

According to the American Sleep Foundation, about half of U.S. adult drivers admit to consistently getting behind the wheel while feeling drowsy. About 20% admit to falling asleep behind the wheel at some point in the past year – with more than 40% admitting this has happened at least once in their driving careers. In fact, an estimated 5,000 people died in 2015 in crashes involving drowsy driving, according to a Governors Highway Safety Association report. Preventing drowsy driving requires drivers to be well-rested, which can be a challenging in our society. Recognizing health conditions that can contribute to fatigue is also important. Health conditions such as sleep apnea or restless leg syndrome can interfere normal sleep cycles, and leave employees operating than less than their best. Medications too, can make drivers sleepy behind the wheel. A 2015 article by Consumer Reports found that side effects warnings are not always clear; new labeling guidelines may help drivers understand when to drive or not drive after taking these medications.