

Safety Cop



Driving Is Serious Business

Businesses with motor vehicle exposures should consider driving safety of paramount importance. Vehicular accidents continue to be a leading cause of occupational deaths in the 21st century — often over one third of all work- related deaths in the U.S.

Driving is a complex task that requires constant attention to changing conditions. Many factors cause vehicular accidents: road conditions, weather, traffic patterns, and failure to follow basic safe driving rules. Traffic experts also cite driver distractions, “multi-tasking” (doing more than one thing at a time), drowsiness and fatigue, lack of proper training, and aggression (“road rage”).

Distractions of all types can spoil a driver’s concentration—cell phone use, passenger conversation, eating or reading while driving. To prevent distractions, New York State mandated that mobile cellular phones be hands-free starting in November 2001.

To fight truck driver fatigue, new federal rules govern property carriers and commercial motor vehicle drivers, effective October 1, 2005. These “Hours of Service” rules provide an increased opportunity for drivers to obtain necessary rest and restorative sleep, while recognizing the business needs of drivers and motor carriers. The rules are available at <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rules-regulations/truck/driver/hos/brochure2005.htm>

Studies show that shift workers and young males tend to drive unsafely when tired. Workers on rotating schedules and with long on-call shifts, such as health care workers, tend to be more accident-prone.

Employers with a motor vehicle exposure must establish a company safe-driving policy and monitor their drivers’ records.

Emphasize safe driving techniques for all employees and frequently reinforce the safety message.

Managers of salespersons, delivery people and couriers must follow up on accidents, near misses and required recordkeeping of their staffs. This can help save lives, increase productivity and lower insurance premiums.

Safe driving policy starts with the hiring process. License verification is available from the NYS Dept. of Motor Vehicles web site (www.nydmv.state.ny.us).

The National Safety Council (www.nsc.org) provides defensive driving courses designed to improve attitude and awareness.

Winter Driving Tips

Winter driving demands attention to road conditions. The following can help drivers safely navigate snowy and icy roads.

- Perform proper cold-weather vehicle maintenance: Check battery, tire condition and treads, windshield wipers, add no-freeze fluid to washers, check cooling system antifreeze, and check for proper tire inflation.
- Stay below posted speed limits. Keep a safe distance from the next vehicle. Reduce speed when necessary, anticipate sudden stops.
- Avoid braking heavily on wet or icy roads.
- Watch for icy patches on bridges and in shade— “black ice” is treacherous.
- Drive in the tracks of the vehicle in front of you to avoid hydroplaning. Avoid puddles.
- In a skid ease off the accelerator. If your vehicle has antilock brakes (ABS), brake firmly and steer. Without ABS, pump the brakes to avoid wheel-lock (but avoid using the brakes to stop the skid). Either way, gently steer into the skid to regain control of the vehicle.
- Have sunglasses handy to reduce snow glare.

Safety & Risk Management

