

SAFETY FIRST BEHIND THE WHEEL

Motor vehicle accidents are a leading cause of workplace fatalities. To avoid becoming a statistic, follow these tips for safe driving:

- Your vehicle must be in good mechanical condition before you start. Brakes, steering, lights and horn should all be in good working order. Make sure the tire pressure is correct.
- Windows and windshields should be clean -inside and out - for maximum visibility and minimum glare. Headlights and tail-lights should also be free of dirt or snow.
- If a vehicle is new to you, you must know how to operate all controls before starting out. A sudden rainstorm is the wrong time to start looking for the windshield wiper controls. It is a good idea to check over the operator's manual for the vehicle. Some vehicles require special training to operate.
- Wear your seat belt and safety harness. Don't just save these for long highway trips - most accidents happen at low speeds on short trips. Also make sure headrests are adjusted correctly. These are designed to reduce whiplash neck injuries.
- Never operate a vehicle under the influence of alcohol or other drug. We all know drinking and driving is a bad combination. But driving is also affected by drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, painkillers, tranquilizers and other over-the-counter medications for allergies and colds.
- Keep your mind on your driving. Before you drive away, put your worries out of your mind. Calm down if you are angry.
- Make sure you are alert and energetic before driving. Fatigue and sleepiness are common causes of traffic accidents.
- Take care of distracting activities such as tuning the radio, pouring a cup of coffee, or talking on a mobile phone before you drive away.
- Observe speed limits. Excessive speed causes many accidents, and it contributes to greater injuries and damage in accidents.
- Adjust speed according to road and weather conditions. The following are just a few good reasons to slow down: Heavy traffic, rough road surfaces, construction activity, ice, rain, snow and fog.
- Keep enough space between you and the vehicle in front so you can brake in time if it suddenly stops. Allowing space between your vehicle and others can give you an "out" in case you should need to stop suddenly or swerve.

- Never pass in a "no passing" zone. When you do decide to pass another vehicle, remember to look for on-coming traffic - and traffic behind or beside you. Check your blind spot and make sure you are not being passed. When it's all clear to pass, signal and pull out. Remember to signal when you return to your own lane.

- When another vehicle passes you, keep an eye on that vehicle as well as all the traffic around you. It might be necessary for you to slow down or speed up if the other vehicle needs to quickly return to your lane either in front or behind you.

- Don't rush your start when the light turns green and don't speed through a caution light. When you approach an intersection where the light has been green for some time, expect it to change.

- Always expect other drivers to do the unexpected. Be prepared for other drivers to run red lights, pass when unsafe, swerve into your lane, or slam on the brakes. Continually update your "emergency plan" in case the other driver makes a wrong move.

- Continually watch for pedestrian traffic. Be prepared for pedestrians, as well as bicyclists and pets, to make sudden moves. When driving beside parked cars, be ready for someone to open a car door or step out between the cars.

- When entering a freeway, accelerate so you can merge with the traffic. Figure out your exit from the freeway far in advance so you are not tempted to make sudden lane changes. Drive beyond your exit to the next one if you are not able to exit safely. Strictly observe the speed limits for freeway exits - you might have to slow down quickly.

- Never get into a conflict with another driver. Let the other vehicle pass, turn and change lanes.

Good driving skills are a matter of life and death. Practice them every time you get behind the wheel