

Safety Circular

August 2021

Driver Safety

More than 35,000 people die in crashes every year on U.S. roads. That comes to about 96 deaths every day – or four deaths every hour. Many of those deaths are the result of incidents that take place during the workday or during the commute to-and-from work. More than 90% of crashes are the result of driver error and, therefore, are preventable.

Distracted Driving

New technology in vehicles is causing us to become more distracted behind the wheel than ever before. Fifty-three percent of drivers believe if manufacturers put "infotainment" dashboards and hands-free technology in vehicles, they must be safe. And, with some state laws focusing on handheld bans, many drivers honestly believe they are making the safe choice by using a hands-free device. But in fact, these technologies distract our brains even long after you've used them. Make no mistake: This multitasking technology is about convenience, not safety.

Thousands die every year in incidents involving smartphones and distractions from dashboard infotainment systems. Simple proactive steps could save you from an accident.

- Program/start GPS equipment prior to starting the vehicle or pull over and park if changes need to be made
- Turn off smartphones or other devices before starting the vehicle
- Inform clients, associates and business partners that calls will be returned when they are not driving
- Pull over to a safe location and put the vehicle in park if a call must be made.



Cell Phones

Many distractions exist while driving, but cell phones are a top distraction because so many drivers use them for long periods of time each day. Almost everyone has seen a driver distracted by a cell phone, but when you are the one distracted, you often don't realize that driver is you.

Many drivers continue to use phones even when they are aware of the crash risk associated with distraction. Stay focused by not making calls, accepting calls, texting or accessing the internet or applications while driving.

Multitasking is a Myth. Driving and cell phone conversations both require a great deal of thought. When doing them at the same time, your brain is unable to do either well. For example, it's nearly impossible to read a book and have a phone conversation. While driving, this often results in crashes due to delayed braking times and not seeing traffic signals.

Click It or Ticket, Texas.



Saved by the belt

Wearing a seat belt reduces the risk of dying by 45 percent for people in the front seat of passenger cars. For those in pickups, seat belts reduce the risk of dying by 60 percent since pickups are more likely to roll over than passenger vehicles.

Your seat belt is the single most effective safety device in your vehicle. If you're traveling at 50 mph and stop suddenly, your unbuckled body will keep moving at 50 mph. Your seat belt is designed to keep you from being thrown into the dashboard or windshield—or even onto the road.

Airbags can be big lifesavers too, but without seat belts they can be ineffective and even dangerous. In a crash, seat belts ensure you're not thrown into a fast-opening airbag—a force that could injure or kill you. You may think your airbag is going to protect you, but it's designed to work with seat belts, not to replace them.

Driver or passenger, front seat or back, state law requires everyone in the vehicle to be buckled up. Not buckling up could cost you up to \$200 in court costs and fines. Or even worse, it could cost you your life.

Speeding

Speeding is a major factor in traffic deaths and injuries. The role of speeding in crashes is described in terms of its effect on the driver, the vehicle, and the road. Excessive speeding reduces the amount of time the driver has to react in a dangerous situation to avoid a crash, increases vehicle stopping distance, and reduces the ability of road safety structures (such as guardrails, impact attenuators, crash cushions, median dividers, and concrete barriers) to protect vehicle occupants in a crash.

Speeding was a factor in 26% of all traffic fatalities in 2019, killing 9,478, or an average of over 25 people per day. The total number of fatal motor-vehicle crashes attributable to speeding was 8,544. A crash is considered speeding-related if the driver was charged with a speeding-related offense or if racing, driving too fast for conditions, or exceeding the posted speed limit was indicated as a contributing factor in the crash.





Driving Drowsy

Drowsy driving is the dangerous combination of driving and sleepiness or fatigue. This can happen to a driver for several reasons.

- Untreated sleeping disorders
- Medication
- Not enough sleep
- Drinking Alcohol
- Shift Work

Signs you are driving drowsy

- Difficulty focusing, keeping your head up or eyes open.
- Yawning or blinking
- frequently
- Drifting
- Trouble remembering the last few miles driven

If you are exhibiting signs of driving drowsy, do not continue to operate the vehicle!

Drunk driving can have serious consequences, far beyond the legal and financial ones. Thousands of lives are permanently impacted each year because of someone's decision to get behind the wheel while impaired from the effects of alcohol.

Plan While You Can:

Be sure that you make a plan for a safe ride home before enjoying festivities where drinking alcohol may occur. Remember a designated driver is not one who is "least drunk" but should be a *sober driver* who has not consumed any amount of alcohol.

A great resource that can help Texans make a plan for a safe ride before going out is SoberRides.org. It's very important everyone understands the severity of a DWI. When drivers get stopped for being under the influence of alcohol they could face up to \$17,000 in fines and fees, jail time and could lose their license.

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The Safety Circular, a publication of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Risk Management Department, is published monthly in an effort to promote and enhance risk management awareness on issues relating to TDCJ employees. Design and layout of the Safety Circular is performed by Kim Roberson, Risk Management. Comments, suggestions and safety related items are welcome.

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