

Defensive driving strategies

By Ted Ingalls

Before you begin

1. Identify all vehicle-related activities your organization utilizes.
2. Identify all vehicle incidents or near incidents that have occurred within the past five years. You may want to ask others for their thoughts in preparation.
3. Have a flip chart or whiteboard available to capture the discussion points and answers to questions.
4. Use a question and answer format that encourages participation and involves the group in the discussion.



Driving is risky business. Essentially, people — young and old, blue-collar workers and company presidents — are in control of lethal weapons when they drive on our roadways.

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports 43,220 people lost their lives in vehicle incidents during 2002. Fifty-eight percent of those killed were not wearing a seat belt and 40 percent were in some way impaired. Occupationally, 22 percent of work-related fatalities resulted from vehicle mishaps.

Think of that waste. Think of the suffering of those injured ... and those who lose family and friends.

Ask how many of the group or their families have been involved in a motor vehicle incident.

Ask how many incidents involved only property damage, and how many involved injury.

Record the numbers on the flip chart or whiteboard.

Ask the group who is responsible for driving safely. The correct answer is: we the drivers are solely responsible. It is up to us to drive safely and to look out for others.

Ask the group to identify the major causes of vehicle incidents. Write the group's ideas on the flip chart or whiteboard.

See if the group's ideas compare favorably to those of safety professionals who were asked the same question.

○ Distractions	40	percent
○ Aggressive driving	22	percent
○ Drinking	12.8	percent
○ Seat belt use	12.5	percent
○ Speeding	7.0	percent
○ Drowsy driving	3.5	percent
○ Failure to yield	2.2	percent

Discuss how the group feels about these causes and request they share their observations or their personal experiences that exemplify the causes.

Conclude this part of the discussion. The truth is this: They are all important. Any one of those behaviors can lead to the death of an employee or a member of your family.

Let's be honest: Showing gory pictures does not change driving behavior.

So, how can we help drivers avoid incidents? First, buckle up – always. Have everyone in the vehicle use their seat belt. Second, avoid distractions.

Ask the group to identify all the possible driving distractions they can think of, including those at work or at home. Write their answers on the flip chart or whiteboard.

The message for everyone is this: Each of us must wear a seat belt and eliminate distractions. The consequences of failure are potentially life-threatening.

Ask if there are additional tips that will help us improve our driving abilities. The answer is "Yes." Use the "Four A's" of driving.

- Anticipate. Drivers must remain alert at all times to what is going on around them and in the distance ahead.
- Adjust. Drivers must continually adjust to changing circumstances. The extremely changing nature of driving requires constant attention to detail and adjustment.
- Assume Nothing. Drivers should take nothing for granted.
- Allow No Distractions. Drivers need to stay focused on their job of driving safely and arriving at their destination without incident.

Conclusion

Since employees are licensed drivers, sound, safe-driving principles should be taught and reinforced. To do nothing invites possibly devastating consequences to our families and friends who might suffer because we thought the subject was unimportant.

Group action

Ask the group how they think the information in this session could be put to good use.

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We always strive to improve the *Safety Leader's Discussion Guide*. Your feedback can help. Please send your comments via e-mail to Safety@ohiobwc.com.

References

Web sites

- Safety on the Road (National Safety Council): www.nsc.org/safety_road/Pages/safety_on_the_road.aspx
- Defensive Driving (Deerbrook Insurance Co.): www.deerbrook.com/auto_safety/defensive_driving.asp
- Defensive Driving (Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration): www.fmcsa.dot.gov/facts-research/research-technology/publications/accidenthm/driver.htm

Videos

BWC's Division of Safety & Hygiene's video library has a number of videos on driving safety. These are available for loan to Ohio employers. Order a catalog by calling **1-800-OHIOBWC** (ask for the video library), or visit our Web site, ohiobwc.com.