

Motor-vehicle safety

Initiative

Each year, traffic-related crashes claim the lives of more workers, both statewide and nationally, than any other single cause.

The purpose of this Minnesota OSHA Safety Hazard Alert is to heighten public awareness of this often-overlooked occupational hazard and to provide employers and employees with some tips about how to abate it.

Description of the hazard

In a review of data from a five-year period, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) found that at least 56 percent of workers killed in traffic crashes were not wearing seat belts. The leading contributing factors to these crashes included: running off the road or crossing out of the proper lane, speeding, driver inattention and drivers who were drowsy or fell asleep. Alcohol use by the driver was involved in 8 percent of the accidents.

Controlling the hazard

The single most important prevention measure from worker death or serious injury is the use of seat belts. Federal OSHA and the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) have actively promoted seat belt usage recently through the “Every Belt – Every Ride” program.

Other precautions employees can take to reduce the likelihood of being involved in traffic accidents include:

- driving within the speed limit;
- avoiding driving when tired or fatigued; and
- becoming familiar with vehicle maintenance.

NIOSH and OSHA have identified four key areas employers should focus on to reduce crash-related injuries: policies, fleet management, safety programs and driver performance.

Among the recommended policy components are:

- assigning responsibility and authority to a key management team member for developing and enforcing the driver safety program;
- enforcing mandatory seat belt use;
- developing work schedules that do not require workers to exceed speed limits, work far beyond their normal hours, drive during irregular hours or violate regulatory hours of service; and
- not permitting or requiring them to use cellular phones while driving.

Fleet management issues include establishing a written vehicle maintenance program and providing employees with vehicles that offer the highest possible levels of occupant protection.

Safety training program content should include:

- recognition and management of fatigue and in-vehicle distractions;
- the importance of safe driving practices both on and off the job; and
- safe operation of any specialized vehicles and equipment.

Driver performance should be gauged by ensuring the employee has a valid driver's license to operate the assigned vehicle, checking the employee's driving record on an initial and periodic basis, and maintaining records about driving performance.

For more information

Employers and employees with questions or concerns can consult the federal OSHA and NIOSH Motor Vehicle Safety topics Web pages or call MNOSHA Compliance at (651) 284-5050 or toll-free at 1-877-470-6742. The federal OSHA page is located at www.osha.gov/SLTC/motorvehiclesafety and the NIOSH page is located at www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/motorvehicle.

For more information about the requirements for motor vehicles used off the highway, refer to Minnesota Statutes 5205.0750, Motorized Self-Propelled Vehicles, for general industry and 29 CFR 1926.600-.602 for construction.

