



TDCJ Risk Management's *Training Circular*

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Safe Driving and On/Off Road Safety

When driving is part of your job duties, whether you are behind the wheel of a rental vehicle, a van, a company car, or an eighteen-wheeler, you are a professional driver. Most drivers can drive around the block without incident, but it takes a dedicated professional to drive perfectly for thousands of miles.

Remember to remain professional. When you operate a vehicle as part of your job, you are representing the agency in the public

When professional drivers are at the controls of any vehicle they should always remember that defensive driving is a full-time job. A defensive driver is someone who looks out for the mistakes of other drivers; not merely a person who has had the good fortune to avoid accidents.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) preliminary data for 2008, Texas employers reported 200 fatalities resulted from work-related transportation accidents. The BLS nonfatal data shows

4,360 cases in 2008 that required days away from work due to transportation accidents. For the employers and injured employees, a workplace crash can have far-reaching financial, medical, and legal consequences.

DON'T BE DISTRACTED

A key point in driving safety is to remain focused. In order to accomplish this, drivers should reduce the number of distractions they may have while driving.

A recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study performed by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute has reported that "nearly 80 percent of crashes and 65 percent of near-crashes involved some form of driver inattention within three seconds before the event.

Primary causes of driver inattention are distracting activities, such as cell phone use, and drowsiness." Some of the highest risk distractions while

driving are reaching for a moving object, an insect in your vehicle, looking at an object outside the vehicle, entering data on a hand-held device keypad, changing a CD, applying makeup, and reading. Professional drivers should eliminate distractions from their driving habits and know how to identify other drivers who may be distracted while driving.



PLAN AHEAD

Prior to vehicle travel, always plan ahead. By following some of these simple tips, you can increase the likelihood of having a safe trip:

- Prepare a travel plan prior to departure. Review maps or pre-program GPS devices.
- Notify a coworker or supervisor of your travel

- plans and planned route.
- Conduct a pre-trip inspection. Ensure the vehicle has current maintenance records. Fill up with fuel and have other fluids checked regularly.
- Have a back up plan to include an alternate travel route in the event of construction or traffic might impede your travel.
- Take the time to complete pre-trip checklists, perform inspections that familiarize the driver with the vehicle and identify unsafe mechanical conditions that may need repair. Do not operate a vehicle that is not safe for travel.



SIGNALS, SIGNS, AND MARKERS

Traffic signals help provide for the orderly movement of traffic. Drivers must obey these signals except when an officer is directing traffic. You must obey a traf-

fic officer at all times, even if he is telling you to do something which is ordinarily considered against the law.

Traffic signs can help you to be a better driver. They help you in the following ways:

1. They **WARN** of hazards ahead that would otherwise be difficult to see.
2. They **GUIDE** drivers to their destination by identifying the route.
3. They **INFORM** of local regulations and practices.
4. They **REGULATE** the speed and movement of traffic.

Warning signs alert drivers to conditions which lie immediately ahead and tell them what to look for. There may be road hazards, changes in direction or some other situation which you should know about. Not only must warning signs be observed for the sake of safety, but to disregard them may be a traffic violation.

Regulatory signs tell us what we must do. Drivers are required to obey them in the same manner as traffic laws. These signs are one way to help protect your safety.

Guide signs are especially helpful when you are not in your home area. They tell you what road you are on and how to get where you wish to go. They furnish information which makes the trip more pleasant and interesting. This page shows only a few examples of many such guide signs.

SPEED LIMITS

It is the employee's responsibility to adhere to all laws pertaining to the operation of a motor vehicle. The employee is also responsible for any violation associated with the operation of a state vehicle.

Generally you should drive at the same speed as the main stream of traffic. You should always be aware of how fast you are traveling. You must obey speed limits, but a good driver does even more.

All drivers are required to obey posted maximum and minimum speed limits. These limits are designed to provide for the orderly flow of traffic under normal driving conditions. During periods of heavy traffic, inclement weather, low visibility, or other poor driving conditions, speed must be adjusted so that accidents will be avoided.

SAFETY BELTS

The driver and all adult passengers (i.e. passengers who are at least 17 years of age) in a passenger vehicle are required to use safety belts if occupying a seat in a vehicle equipped with a factory installed safety belt. Children who are under 8 years of age and less than 4'9" in height (regardless of age) are required by law to be secured in an appropriate child passenger safety seat if occupying a seat in a vehicle equipped with a safety belt. Children who are

at least 8 years of age but under 17 or who are under 8 years of age but taller than 4'9" in height must be secured in a safety belt if occupying a seat in a vehicle so equipped. Safety belt requirements include pickups, SUVs, and trucks. Safety belts are life belts and help to keep you:

- From being thrown from your car (your chances of being killed are five times greater if you are thrown from your car)
- From hitting the dashboard too hard
- Better control of your car

Whatever your reason for not wearing safety belts, it is not reasonable and may violate state law.

ACCIDENTS

If you are operating a motor vehicle that is involved in a crash resulting in **injury** to or **death** of a person, you must immediately stop your vehicle at the scene of the crash (or as close as possible to the scene of the crash) without obstructing traffic more than is necessary. If your vehicle is not stopped at the scene of the crash, you must immediately return to the scene of the crash.



When an employee is involved in an accident in a state vehicle, the nearest law enforcement agency shall be notified, unless the accident occurred on TDCJ property. If the accident occurs on TDCJ property, the warden or ranking authority shall be contacted. For additional information regarding accidents involving TDCJ vehicles, review AD-02.50 VEHICLE POLICY.

PEDESTRIAN/WORKER SAFETY

Avoid turning your car into a deadly weapon. You should always be on the lookout for people on foot whether or not they have the right-of-way. Drivers must yield to pedestrians in the following situations:

If you see a pedestrian crossing or attempting to cross the street, slow down, use your horn if necessary, and be prepared to stop. Be alert to a pedestrian guided by an assistance animal or carrying a white cane.

A driver shall take the necessary precautions to avoid injuring or endangering a pedestrian crossing or attempting to cross the street. The driver shall bring the vehicle to a full stop if injury or danger can only be avoided by that action.

The driver should always pay special attention to the pedestrian and the bicyclist. However, there are certain safety rules which pedestrians and bicyclists should follow.

High visibility is one of the most prominent needs for workers who must perform tasks near moving vehicles or equipment. The need to be seen by those who drive or operate vehicles or equipment is recognized as a critical issue for worker safety. The sooner a worker in or near the path of travel is seen, the more time the operator has to avoid an accident.

The FHWA recognized this fact and included language in the 2000 Edition of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) to address this issue. Employees and offenders who's job exposes them to vehicular traffic shall be provided with, and shall wear; warning vests or other suitable garments marked with or made of reflectorized or high-visibility material.



15 PASSENGER VAN SAFETY

The National Transportation Safety Board has recognized the inherent danger associated with 15-passenger vans and has issued a Safety Alert bulletin to warn of the hazards and provide guidance for safe operation.

One of the primary concerns regarding 15-passenger vans is that their tires are often underinflated, leading to higher tire temperatures, faster tire deterioration, and diminished driving stability. Front and back tires may require different inflation pressures and these pressures may be higher than those of passenger car tires. Van tire pressures are typically 50 lbs in the front tires and 80 lbs in the rear. Follow manufacturer's recommended pressure as provided on the drivers doorsill or in the owner's manual.



Adding passengers and cargo causes the center of gravity to move upward and rearward, increasing a vehicle's tendency to roll over and increasing the potential for the driver to lose control in emergency maneuvers. Fifteen-passenger vans are three times more likely to roll over when loaded with more than ten passengers.

Often visibility is impaired when backing and turning these vans. Using a spotter when backing may prevent an accident when backing.

Drivers of 15-passenger vans should be trained on the haz-

ards associated with these vehicles prior to operation.

As with any vehicle, conduct a pre-trip inspection to ensure the safety of the driver and any intended passengers.

OFF ROAD SAFETY

When operating utility vehicles, weather it be on or off state property, the following precautions should be followed:

- Follow vehicle manufacturer safe operation recommendations.
- Only allow riders where an appropriate seat is provided as designed by the manufacturer or for those vehicles with roll-over-protection only those seats with a seatbelt installed. Hitchhiking shall not be permitted.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment.

For more information regarding use of ATV's on state property, refer to SM-02.03 Use of All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV's) on State Property.

REFERENCES

- AD-02.50 Vehicle Policy
- Lab Safety Supply EZ Fact Sheet -153 High Visibility Safety Apparel
- SM-01.10 Operation and Parking of Vehicles on TDCJ-Correctional Institutions Division (CID) Unit Property
- SM-02-03 Use of All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV's) on State Property.
- TXDPS Drivers Handbook

- TDI Resource Library. Fact Sheets
- Texas Correctional Industries
www.tci.tdcj.state.tx.us/products/garment/apparel/safetyvest.aspx



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