

Drive Safely to Work Week: Avoid the 'Big 5'

October 5-9 is Drive Safely to Work Week. The event is sponsored by the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS). NETS is dedicated to improving the safety of employees, their families and the community by promoting safe driving practices to prevent traffic crashes that occur both on- and off-the-job.

Five high-risk mistakes are behind the majority of accidents. Avoiding these five mistakes could prevent most motor vehicle accidents, injuries, and deaths:

- Not paying enough attention to driving
- Following too closely
- Driving too fast
- Failing to obey traffic signs and signals
- Backing up unsafely

Ten simple steps can prevent most traffic accidents. NETS urges you to use these 10 positive steps for responsible driving:

- Plan your route. Try to avoid congested roads, roads under repair, dangerous intersections, and other spots where accidents often occur.
- Maintain your vehicle. Safe vehicles are routinely maintained and repaired, and visually inspected before each trip.
- Pay attention to your driving. Eyes should be on the road, hands on the wheel, and mind on the driving-not drinking, eating, applying cosmetics, reading the paper, etc.
- Minimize distractions. That means the radio, CD players, iPods, conversations with passengers, and so on. CA law prohibits the use of cell phones, including texting, while driving (CA MVC; Section: 23123).
- Know your surroundings. Know where you're going and what the hazards might be along your route.
- Share your space. Respect the right of way of other vehicles and pedestrians. Be a careful, defensive driver.
- Watch your speed. Keep within the speed limit, and adjust your speed to traffic and weather conditions.
- Keep your distance. Under normal conditions, maintain a distance of 3 seconds behind the car in front on the highway and 4 seconds at night, in bad weather, or when road conditions are bad.
- Signal your intentions. Use your flashers to let other drivers know when you're going to turn. Use hand signals or pump your brakes to let other drivers know when you're slowing down or preparing to stop.

- CA law requires that you wear a seat belt (CA MVC; Section: 27315). Seat belts save lives and prevent or minimize injuries. Everyone in the vehicle, including passengers in the back seat, are required to wear a seat belt-even for short trips and local driving.

Distracted or drowsy driving takes a deadly toll on the nation's roads. NETS points to a study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration which concludes that in nearly 80 percent of crashes or near-crashes drivers are distracted or drowsy just before the accident. According to the study, distracted driving contributes to many more accidents than previously thought.

The study also finds that 20 percent of crashes are caused by drowsiness and that drowsiness often occurs in the morning or during the day when you would think drivers would be wide awake. The study concludes that drowsy driving increases a driver's risk of having an accident or near-crash on the road by four to six times.

Here are some tips to help you deal with drowsy driving:

- Have a healthy energy snack like a yogurt or piece of fruit before you leave the house. Food in your stomach will give you energy and help keep you alert.
- Pull over, get out, walk around a little, and have a cup of coffee if you feel drowsy while driving.
- Stop and take a short 10-15 minute nap if you can't keep your eyes open.
- Ask a passenger to take over driving if you're too tired to drive.
- Leave your car and take public transportation if you feel like you're too tired to drive safely.

Why you should participate in *Drive Safely to Work Week*...

According to NETS:

- Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death and injury in the nation's workforce.
- A traffic crash occurs every 5 minutes in the United States and many of those who are involved are employees commuting to or from work.
- While most employees think they're good, safe drivers, national traffic accident statistics indicate otherwise (6 million crashes that resulted in 42,642 fatalities and just under 2.6 million people injured in one recent year).
- Most traffic accidents are preventable if employees follow common-sense rules of the road.

When we share the responsibility for safety in the workplace, everyone wins!!