

The Hazards of Driving

Driving for Work can seriously damage your health! – its official!

Introduction

We live in an increasingly mobile culture and economy. We require our staff to travel increasingly greater distances, often with tight deadlines, and during these periods of travel expect them to undertake many other aspects of their duties, including taking telephone calls, arranging meetings and continuing with their administrative commitments. This is now all made possible because of the advances in technology, mobile phones, wireless networking for computers and remote access of emails. This increasing mobility within our workforces leads to an increase in hazards, both physical and health hazards.

For example:-

- Lack of concentration while driving due to the fact that a mobile phone is ringing can lead to an increase in frequency of accidents.
- An increase in psychological pressure (stress) in an employee may present as an increased frequency of non-serious road traffic accidents.
- Reducing the travelling time in order to make deadlines or meetings can place an employee at increased risk of road traffic accidents.
- Work related muscle and joint pain including the dreaded 'RSI' is seen increasingly in mobile worker who now face conditions such as 'Blackberry thumb' because of the cramped awkward positions in which they have to use their mobile telephones or laptop computers in their vehicles.
- New guidelines from the current Prosecution Service indicate that drivers who are distracted by using a mobile phone while driving should be charged with dangerous driving. This carries a maximum penalty of 2 years on jail!
- A recent survey showed that 2 out of 3 privately owned vehicles driven on company business were unsafe to be on the road! Some 71% of the maintenance problems identified were tyre related and should have been picked up by any driver who conducted basic safety checks. RoSPA recently indicated that 100 people a year die on Scotland's roads while driving for work. This is 3 times the number of people who are killed in work related accidents in Scotland!

It is important that not only are such activities appropriately risk assessed, but in addition staff must be given simple advice and techniques to overcome the worst pressures placed upon them of their increasing mobility. Such an initiative can literally save lives.

Recent research carried out within the United Kingdom indicated:-

- ◆ Drivers were more pressured in the evenings than in the morning.
- ◆ 1 in 10 people who drive for work admit that they have fallen asleep at the wheel in the past 12 months
- ◆ Half the individuals surveyed who drive for work admitted that they sometimes have fewer than 5 hours sleep each night.
- ◆ Older drivers found driving less stressful than younger drivers.
- ◆ Older drivers coped better and were more relaxed in traffic jams and with delays.
- ◆ Younger drivers experienced more symptoms of anxiety towards the end of the working week.
- ◆ Older drivers showed their highest levels of anxiety in the middle of the working week.

Research indicates that pressure on drivers has a number of components:-

- Aggression of other drivers.
- An individual's dislike of driving.
- Issues associated with overtaking.
- Increased alertness and requirements for concentration.

The main sources of psychological pressure have been identified as:-

- Bad weather conditions.
- Poor road conditions.
- An increase in the volume of traffic.
- Attempting to keep to a tight time schedule.
- Domestic pressures outside the workplace.
- The behaviour of other drivers.

Simple tips to manage the hazards and risks of travelling, particularly driving:-

- Be prepared for other drivers to drive erratically and aggressively.
- Be tolerant. Anger is bad for you.
- Accept that travel delays are a fact of life.
- Use any aggression and anger to focus on an alternative activity, such as sport.
- If you do not like driving use alternative forms of transport from time to time. If you are young consider this towards the end of the week. If you are older consider this in the middle of the week.
- Use your car radio, tape or CD player as a way of relaxing while driving.
- If you have recently had an argument, take time before you drive.
- Create a driving diary. Review your week's driving schedule and attempt to identify particularly stressful situations.
- Consciously drive slower for example at 60mph instead of 70mph.
- Use the inside lanes on motorways.

- Plan your journeys in easy stages.
- Do not drive for more than 3 hours at a time.
- Arrange for a basic safety check to be carried out either by the driver concerned or by the Fleet Manager on a regular basis, both on company vehicles and private vehicles used for work.

You may wish to incorporate this information in a company leaflet or as part of your training programme, or in an article for your in-house employee magazine or display this article or sections from it on your company intranet.

It is important to have robust systems in place to manage the hazards and risks of driving as part of an employee's work duties and in particular to prevent tiredness while driving. Such systems should include a driving policy, setting realistic schedules and an ongoing employee education programme.

If you would like any help with any of these initiatives please do not hesitate to contact Penny Lovelock on 01622 775289 or email: p.lovelock@phcohealth.co.uk

NEW CLINIC

PHC now has a new clinic at Coventry, Warks

If you would like one of your employees seen at our new Coventry venue, please

*Contact your PHC Contract Support Administrator who will make the necessary
arrangements.*