



TDCJ Risk Management's *Training Circular*

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April 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.



When professional drivers are at the controls of any vehicle they should always remember that defensive driving is a full-time job. They take the time to complete pre-trip checklists and perform inspections that familiarize the driver with the vehicle and identifies unsafe mechanical conditions that may need repair.

The driving conditions of today's roads and highways demand a higher level of skill, knowledge, and decision-making ability. 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 Insti-

tute 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.

Professional drivers can use the following steps to avoid being distracted while driving.

- Get adequate sleep before any trip because fatigue can decrease attention and reaction time.
- Avoid taking medication that causes drowsiness, either before the trip or while driving.

- Pre-program radio stations.
- Clear the vehicle of unnecessary objects.
- Review and become familiar with all safety and usage features on any in-vehicle electronics.
- Review maps and plan travel route or program your GPS device in advance.
- **Fasten safety belts before starting the vehicle.** Seat belts shall be worn by all employees operating or traveling in a motor vehicle for state business and on TDCJ unit property in accordance with Section 545.413, Texas Transportation Code.
- Check that all passengers are wearing safety belts and that children are in an approved child passenger restraint system or safety belt.
- Adjust all mirrors for best all-around visibility before starting the vehicle.
- Don't read or write while driving.
- Professional drivers can identify other drivers who may be distracted while driving and take measures to insure safety.
- Beware of drivers who are drifting over the centerline or out of their lane.
- Watch out for drivers who are preoccupied with reading, eating, smoking, talking



- on a cell phone, etc.
- Never drive when you become sleepy. It is much more dangerous to drive during the night than during the day. We do not see as well as we do during daylight. When taking a trip, do your driving during the daylight hours it's safer.

ROAD RAGE

The American Automobile Association defines road rage as aggressive driving arising from disagreement between drivers that can result in physical assault. As the number of commuters and travelers on the roads swell, the chance of an encounter with an outraged driver becomes more likely.

The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) began collecting statistics on crashes that listed road rage as a contributing factor in vehicular accidents in early 2000.

Here are some pointers on how you can avoid becoming an enraged driver.

- Allow plenty of time to get to your destination. If you find that you are going to be late, then be late. It is better to arrive at your destination a little late than to have an accident or end up in a confrontation with another driver.
- Avoid tailgating other drivers. Make sure that you follow at least two seconds behind the driver in front of you. This allows you enough room to stop in an

emergency and provides space to other drivers that need to change lanes. If weather affects your stopping or visual distances, you may need to increase this distance.

- Drive in the passing lane only when you are passing. The left lane of multilane highways has been designated as the passing lane and should be used only to pass another vehicle. Use your turn signal when changing lanes. This will let your fellow motorists know your intentions before you move into a new lane or have to turn.

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 traffic 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.

Do not park, stop, or stand your vehicle in a parking space reserved for disabled persons unless your vehicle has a disabled license plate or windshield identification card.

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 inter-

esting. 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.

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:

Situation 1—Uncontrolled intersections.—At an uncontrolled intersection no traffic signs or signals if the pedestrian has entered the crosswalk, you the driver should give him the right-of-way.

Situation 2—Controlled intersections.—If the pedestrian has a "WALK" signal, or, if no pedestrian control signals exist, at a green light, you should give the pedestrian the right-of-way. If the light changes after the pedestrian has already entered

the crosswalk, you should still give the pedestrian the right-of-way.

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. Work which exposes employees and offenders to public 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.

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 Institu-

tions 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



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Oscar Mendoza
Director, Administrative Review and
Risk Management

Robert C. Warren
Risk Management Specialist V
Risk Management

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Robert C. Warren
Risk Management Department
1060 Hwy 190 East
Huntsville, Texas 77340
or,
robert.c.warren@tdcj.texas.gov

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