

Countermeasures to Reduce Vehicle Crashes

According to a study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI), nearly 80 percent of crashes and 65 percent of near-crashes involved some form of driver inattention within three seconds before the event.

Common causes of driver inattention that lead to accidents include:

- Dialing, talking, or listening on a cell phone (the leading distraction).
- Reaching for a moving object.
- Looking away from the forward roadway, even if for only a brief time.
- Drowsiness, which increases the risk of a crash by at least a factor of four.

Your organization can help reduce the risk of accidents by:

- Establishing clear, comprehensive, and enforceable safe driving policies and holding employees accountable.
- Asking employees to sign an agreement that acknowledges their understanding of policies regarding driver performance, vehicle maintenance, and reporting of moving violations.
- Creating a safe driving culture by posting policies throughout your building, distributing copies periodically, and discussing at staff meetings.
- Offering incentives for sticking to the rules and pointing out the consequences of disregarding them.
- Actively encouraging employee involvement at all levels.
- Periodically testing drivers to validate safe driving practices.
- Obtaining Motor Vehicle Records (MVRs) and criminal background checks on all drivers.
- Prohibiting cell phone use when operating a vehicle. If the phone must be used, require the driver to stop the vehicle.
- Adding additional adult supervision when transporting children.
- Reviewing all crashes to determine the cause and future preventive measures.

In addition to the above policies, address the following points with drivers:

- Control speed by driving 5 mph below the speed limit.
- Reinforce a zero tolerance for speeding violations.
- Avoid the far right and left lanes except when preparing to turn; drive in the center lane as much as possible.
- Always maintain the appropriate following distance for the weight and size of the vehicle. Three to four seconds behind the next vehicle is recommended.
- Assume other drivers will make errors.
- Scan ahead to be ready to adjust speed, position, direction, and attention to maneuver safely if a hazard develops.
- Look frequently to the side and rear for passing or approaching vehicles before changing speed, lanes, or direction.

Read more about this study and other safe driving information at www.nhtsa.gov.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.