



OLDER DRIVER WORKPLACE SAFETY

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of work-related deaths in the U.S. Millions of workers, such as long-haul truck drivers, sales representatives, and home health care staff, drive or ride in a motor vehicle as part of their jobs. The type of company or job doesn't matter—the risk is there.

INTRODUCTION

Many of us get in a car every single day to get to work, school, run our errands, or do our shopping. It's important to consider how we as workers and employers can keep safe driving in the front of our minds. Although individual drivers will always have a role to play in motor vehicle safety, organizational-level changes in work environments are a more effective and sustainable means for preventing injury and disability than individual behavior changes.

AGING WORKFORCE

For the aging workforce, this means establishing organizational-level initiatives which encourage safety, health, and well-being across the working life.

Getting started with these approaches can seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be. Start by learning workers' needs related to motor vehicle safety— this means incorporating their feedback in developing policies, programs, and practices. Engage workers of all ages in the discussion, keeping in mind that skills may vary throughout people's working lives, and that driving ability may be affected by declines in vision or hearing or other factors associated with normal aging.

Ask your workers: are there opportunities to improve their working conditions as they relate to driving? Are schedules and shifts impacting driving safety? Are delivery schedules or timelines realistic? Are meal and rest breaks adequate? Be open to suggestions.



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Stress and the distractions that come with it can influence driving, too.

Flexibility can be a key component to improving worker safety. Offering workers control over how and when work is accomplished can help to manage and alleviate job-related stress.

Managers and supervisors can support and encourage motor vehicle safety by:

- Setting goals together for keeping workers safe while operating motor vehicles.
- Rescheduling or re-routing worker travel if driving conditions become unsafe.
- Giving workers a voice in developing safe driving policies, practices, and training programs.
- Offering training tailored to driving risks faced by workers of all ages.
- Providing workers with general information about the possible side effects of medications and chronic medical conditions on their safe driving.
- Connecting workers with resources to prevent or address chronic conditions that could impact driving. Examples could include: local health fairs; screenings for vision, hearing, or substance abuse challenges; or self-administered sleep and sleep apnea questionnaires.
- Offering telework, flex-time, and other flexible work schedule arrangements. This can assist in not only keeping workers off the road during the most hazardous and stressful times, but also in allowing time for general prevention or management of chronic health conditions.

As workers, first-line supervisors, and managers, we each have a role in making sure that driving during the work day and commuting are planned and carried out safely. By considering your workplace's unique needs and challenges, you can better plan and manage travel for all workers in your organization — helping to keep workers safe, healthy, and well throughout their working life.

Older drivers at work bring extensive skills, knowledge, and experience built over the course of a lifespan. Research shows that older drivers are more likely than their younger counterparts to adopt safe behaviors such as wearing a seat belt and complying with speed limits. However, those age 55 and older have twice the risk of dying in a work-related crash than younger workers do. One possible reason is that older persons are more likely

to be injured if they are in a crash, and more likely to die if they are injured.

While older workers are more likely to practice safe driving behaviors, both employers and workers should be aware that it is normal for physical and mental abilities to gradually decline with age – putting them at greater risk of dying if they are in a motor vehicle crash.

- **Eyesight** often worsens with age. Older eyes need more light and more time to adjust when light changes, so it can be hard to see clearly, especially at dawn, dusk, and night. Older drivers may become more sensitive to glare from headlights, street lights, and the sun.
- **Peripheral vision** – the ability to see the side or up and down while looking ahead – often declines as people age, increasing their risk of crashes.
- **Eye diseases** such as cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration become more common with age, making it harder for older drivers to read signs and see colors.
- **Age-related hearing loss** can make it harder to hear horns, sirens, and noises from cars, which warn of possible danger.
- **Diabetes** can make blood sugar levels too high or low, which can lead to drowsiness, dizziness, confusion, loss of consciousness, or seizures.
- **Arthritis** can make joints swollen and stiff, limiting movement of the shoulders, hands, head and neck. This can make it hard to grasp or turn the steering wheel, apply the brake and gas pedals, fasten a seat belt, or look for hazards.
- **Sleep apnea**, a disorder in which breathing is briefly and repeatedly interrupted during sleep, can increase the risk of drowsy driving.
- **Parkinson's disease** can cause a person's arms, hands, and legs to shake. This can affect balance and movement, diminishing a driver's ability to safely operate motor vehicle controls.
- **Other chronic diseases and the use of prescribed, over-the-counter, and multiple medications** may interfere with sleep quality, increasing risk for drowsy driving.
- **Strength** is vital for many driving tasks such as pressing down on a brake pedal
- **Range of motion** is important for fastening a seat belt or turning to look for vehicles and objects.
- **Flexibility** allows the body and joints to move more freely, making it easier to observe the road from all angles. This can help many drivers tasks, including



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looking to the sides and rear of the car, steering and parking.

- **Coordination** helps the upper and lower body work together in situations such as simultaneously braking and turning.
- **Mental abilities**, including memory, attention span, judgment, and ability to make decisions and react quickly, are required for driving. These can gradually decline with age, making older drivers feel overwhelmed by signs, signals, pedestrians, and vehicles around them.

WHAT CAN WORKERS DO TO PREVENT CRASHES

Take the following actions to stay safe while driving for work.

- Use your seat belt at all times and require passengers to do the same
- Prevent distracted driving.
 - Do not text or use a hand-held phone while driving.
 - Avoid using hands-free phones as much as possible.
 - Pull over in a safe location if you must text or make a call.
- Do not drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about the potential effects of your medications on driving.
 - Read medicine labels carefully and look for warnings and potential medication interactions.
 - Do not drive if you feel lightheaded or drowsy.
- Talk with your doctor about how your medical conditions may affect your driving.
- Maintain good health
 - Engage in regular physical activity two and a half hours per week.
 - Adopt a balanced diet of vegetable, grains, protein, fruit, and dairy.
 - Talk with your doctor about what health screenings and exams you need.
 - Stay well-rested and alert by getting 7 to 9 hours of sleep each day.
- See a doctor if you are often tired or sleepy.
- Get a thorough eye exam at least every 1 to 2 years.
 - Make sure your prescription is up-to-date if you need glasses or contacts.
- Use a driving self-assessment tool to evaluate your driving.
 - Seek help from your doctor or someone trained to do more intensive driving assessments if needed.
- Take a driving refresher course to learn new driving strategies and recent changes in traffic laws.
- Talk to your supervisor if you are having difficulty with driving, as you may need to change your driving habits. Some strategies you may discuss are:
 - Attend meetings by phone or video conference.
 - Map out safe routes in advance to drive on well-lit streets with less traffic, clear signs, and easy parking.
- Make necessary adjustments to your car to ensure a good vehicle fit.
 - Maintain a clear line of sight over the steering wheel.
 - Have at least 10 inches separating your chest from the steering wheel.
 - Adjust your seat, seat belt, and head restraint to fit safely and comfortably.
 - Make sure you can easily reach the gas and brake pedals.
- Seek advice from a profession trained in driver rehabilitation or adaptive technologies if chronic pain or decreased range of motion make it difficult to drive.



**WORKERS: LEARN HOW TO
MAINTAIN YOUR DRIVING ABILITY
AND SAFE DRIVING HABITS AS YOU
GROW OLDER**

