

Split-second driving distraction can cause lifetime of pain

By SCF Arizona

Distracted drivers are involved in accidents every 24 seconds, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. What's more, vehicle crashes are the leading cause of occupational fatalities in the United States.

And if a worker is killed or injured, the property loss from workplace traffic accidents cost employers billions of dollars each year.

Businesses with fleet drivers have a greater crash exposure than in other professions, as work experts estimate these types of drivers travel 20,000 to 25,000 miles or more annually.

As Arizona children return to schools statewide, SCF Senior Loss Control Consultant Carl Hamilton said it's a good time for employers to review their drivers' motoring skills. He said drivers typically face three kinds of distractions:

- Visual — taking your eyes off the road
- Manual — taking your hands off the wheel
- Cognitive — taking your mind off what you're doing

Reasons for distractions include everything from texting or talking on a cell phone, to eating, drinking, grooming, talking to other passengers, reading or looking at a map and even something as benign as changing the radio station.

Driving takes concentration and attention. A split-second distraction can cause devastating effects, Hamilton said, adding that employers that rely on drivers may want to look at company policies to ensure safe driving habits are included.

He provided these tips for workers who drive:

- Always wear a seat belt
- Be aware of local regulations regarding mobile phone use, as they can be different from city to city
- Do not engage in any activity that requires you to take your eyes off the road, your mind off of driving or your hands off the steering wheel
- Do not place or receive mobile phone calls while driving – especially in bad weather, while in unfamiliar areas or in heavy traffic that demands your total attention
 - Pull off the road to place or take a call
 - Allow a fellow passenger to handle an incoming call, if you can't pull over
 - Let an incoming phone call go to voice mail

Hamilton said a new state law has taken effect that many motorists may not know. From now on, motorists must provide a one-lane space cushion to emergency and law enforcement officers who are stopped on the side of the road with their lights flashing.

In other words, if you are driving in the right lane, and a DPS officer has pulled someone off onto the shoulder, you need to move to the lane to the left to pass, leaving the right lane free.

Hamilton also said that if you are involved in a workplace car crash, the first thing to do is pull out of traffic if you can, check for injuries and call for medical help if necessary. Also, call the local law enforcement office to report the accident.

Finally, fill out accident report forms as needed for the police, your employer and the insurance company.

Careful, defensive driving and full attention to the road and other motorists will help steer you to safety, Hamilton said. He advised:

- Create a "safety cushion" to allow adequate stopping distance between your vehicle and the car in front.
- Use caution approaching any intersection
- Always look when making left-hand turns – a car in front of you may be obscuring oncoming traffic
- Always use signals and be sure to signal your intentions well in advance
- Drive in the right lane when possible to lessen the chance of a head-on collision if you drive in the right lane
- Follow all the instructional road signs, such as speed limits, yield, etc.

For more information on driving safety, SCF Arizona has six informational pieces: Motor Vehicle Safety Tips; Stay in your Seat – Air Bags/Seat Belts; Driving Essentials; Defensive Drive; Driving Skills; and Driving Dangers. They can be ordered by visiting our website, www.scfaz.com.

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