

Driving Safety in Shorter Daylight Hours



As the days get shorter and winter approaches, employees may find themselves commuting to work, travelling between job sites, making deliveries, or operating vehicles in darkness. Reduced visibility, glare, wet or icy roads, and changing weather conditions can increase the risk of collisions.

Driving safety is a shared responsibility. Employers should provide appropriate training, policies, and resources, while employees must make safe decisions behind the wheel. Whether driving is a primary job responsibility or simply part of the daily commute, the following practices can help reduce risk during the darker months.

Why Shorter Daylight Hours Increase Driving Risks

Driving in darkness reduces visibility and can make it more difficult to see pedestrians, cyclists, road hazards, wildlife, signage, and other vehicles. Glare from headlights can also temporarily affect a driver's vision, particularly when roads are wet or snow-covered.

Winter weather can compound these risks. Snow, freezing rain, fog, and rain can reduce visibility and create slippery road conditions. Longer periods of darkness can also contribute to driver fatigue, particularly for employees who start work very

early or finish late.

Tips for Employees Driving to and From Work

Employees should adjust their driving habits as conditions change. Before leaving, check the weather and road conditions and allow additional travel time when necessary. Avoid rushing to make up for delays caused by poor weather.

Drivers should:

- Clean snow, ice, and frost completely from all windows, mirrors, lights, and the roof of the vehicle before driving.
- Use headlights appropriately and ensure they are clean and functioning properly.
- Reduce speed when visibility or road conditions deteriorate.
- Increase following distance to allow additional stopping time.
- Avoid distractions, including texting, adjusting devices, or eating while driving.
- Watch carefully for pedestrians and cyclists, particularly around intersections, parking lots, and poorly lit areas.
- Avoid driving when overly tired and take breaks during longer trips.
- Keep an emergency kit in the vehicle appropriate for winter conditions.

Employees should never feel pressured to drive when conditions are unsafe. If severe weather makes travel hazardous, employees should follow their employer's established procedures for reporting delays, requesting alternative arrangements, or postponing non-essential travel.

Employer Responsibilities

Employers should review their driving and workplace transportation policies before winter conditions arrive. This is particularly important for organizations with employees who regularly travel between locations or operate company vehicles.

Employers can help reduce risk by providing defensive driving and winter driving training, establishing clear expectations around vehicle inspections and maintenance, and ensuring employees understand that safety takes priority over meeting schedules or delivery deadlines.

For work-related travel, employers should also consider weather monitoring, trip planning, communication procedures, fatigue management, and processes for postponing or rerouting travel when conditions become unsafe.

Parking lots, loading areas, access roads, and pedestrian routes should also be inspected regularly. Adequate lighting, snow and ice removal, and clearly marked pedestrian areas can help reduce the risk of vehicle-pedestrian incidents on worksites.

Safety Tips for Truck Drivers

Truck drivers and other commercial drivers may spend extended periods driving in darkness, making visibility and fatigue management especially important.

Before starting a shift, drivers should complete a thorough pre-trip inspection, including headlights, brake lights, turn signals, tires, mirrors, windshield condition, wipers, and other safety equipment. Lights and reflective markings should be kept clean and visible.

Drivers should reduce speed when necessary, maintain a safe

following distance, and be particularly cautious when approaching stopped or slow-moving vehicles. High beams should be used appropriately without creating glare for other road users.

Fatigue is another major concern. Long shifts, overnight driving, and irregular schedules can make it difficult to remain alert. Drivers should follow applicable hours-of-service requirements, take required breaks, recognize signs of fatigue, and stop driving when they are no longer able to operate safely.

Make Winter Driving Safety a Workplace Priority

Shorter daylight hours are a predictable seasonal hazard, making fall an excellent time to refresh driving safety procedures. Employers can help protect workers by combining training, vehicle maintenance, trip planning, fatigue management, and clear communication.

For employees, the most important rule is simple: slow down, stay alert, and adjust your driving to the conditions. A few extra minutes of preparation or travel time can make a significant difference when visibility is limited and winter conditions arrive.