Transportation Safety: Managing Summer Driving Risks



Summer is often associated with ideal driving conditions, but for employers and workers, the season presents a unique set of transportation safety challenges. Increased traffic volumes, road construction, vacation travel, extreme heat, and driver fatigue can all contribute to a heightened risk of motor vehicle incidents. Whether employees are commuting to a worksite, traveling between job locations, operating fleet vehicles, or driving home after a long shift, transportation safety remains a critical occupational health and safety concern.

For many organizations, motor vehicle incidents represent one of the leading causes of workplace fatalities and serious injuries. Worksite managers and OHS professionals should take proactive steps during the summer months to identify driving hazards and reinforce safe driving practices across their workforce.

Why Summer Driving Can Be More Dangerous

Many people assume winter driving presents the greatest risks, but summer introduces hazards that can be just as dangerous.

One of the most significant factors is increased traffic. Summer vacation travel places more passenger vehicles,

recreational vehicles, motorcycles, cyclists, and pedestrians on roads. Congested highways and local roads increase the likelihood of collisions, particularly for workers who spend significant time driving as part of their job.

Road construction is another major concern. Across North America, warmer weather allows municipalities and contractors to undertake infrastructure repairs and road improvement projects. Temporary lane closures, detours, reduced speed zones, and changing traffic patterns can create confusion and increase the potential for incidents.

Heat can also affect driver performance. High temperatures contribute to fatigue, dehydration, reduced concentration, and slower reaction times. In vehicles without adequate air conditioning, prolonged exposure to heat can become a serious health concern, particularly for workers making multiple stops throughout the day.

Industries Most Affected

Transportation risks extend far beyond trucking and transportation companies. Many sectors rely heavily on workers driving as part of their daily responsibilities, including:

- Construction and skilled trades
- Utilities and telecommunications
- Municipal and public works services
- Delivery and courier operations
- Transportation and logistics
- Oil and gas operations
- Agriculture and farming
- Landscaping and grounds maintenance
- Field service and maintenance organizations
- Healthcare and community support services

Employees may face risks while traveling between jobsites, conducting inspections, making deliveries, transporting

equipment, or commuting after physically demanding workdays.

Common Summer Driving Hazards

Several hazards deserve special attention during the summer months:

Driver Fatigue

Long daylight hours often lead workers to extend their activities both on and off the job. Combined with physically demanding work, this can contribute to fatigue and reduced alertness behind the wheel.

Distracted Driving

Mobile devices, navigation systems, work communications, and in-vehicle technology continue to be significant contributors to motor vehicle incidents. Even brief distractions can have serious consequences.

Impaired Driving

Summer social events, holidays, and recreational activities can increase the risk of impaired driving. Employers should continue to reinforce zero-tolerance policies regarding alcohol, cannabis, and other impairing substances.

Road Construction Zones

Workers driving through construction areas may encounter narrowed lanes, sudden stops, changing traffic patterns, and reduced visibility. Following posted speed limits and remaining alert are essential.

Vehicle Breakdowns

Extreme heat can place additional stress on tires, batteries,

cooling systems, and engines. Poor vehicle maintenance can increase the risk of roadside breakdowns and collisions.

Summer Driving Safety Checklist

To reduce transportation-related risks, employers should encourage workers to follow these safe driving practices:

Conduct Pre-Trip Vehicle Inspections

Drivers should check tires, brakes, lights, mirrors, fluid levels, and air conditioning systems before beginning their journey.

Stay Hydrated

Dehydration can affect concentration and decision-making. Drivers should carry water and take regular breaks during long trips.

Plan Routes in Advance

Review travel routes, construction zones, weather conditions, and expected traffic delays before leaving.

Eliminate Distractions

Mobile phones and other distractions should be avoided while driving. Hands-free does not always mean risk-free.

Manage Fatigue

Encourage workers to recognize signs of fatigue, take rest breaks when needed, and avoid driving when overly tired.

Maintain Safe Following Distances

Heavy traffic and construction zones often require additional stopping distance and increased awareness.

Keep Vehicles Well Maintained

Preventive maintenance programs help identify mechanical issues before they become safety hazards.

Promote Defensive Driving

Drivers should anticipate the actions of other road users, remain patient in traffic, and adapt to changing road conditions.

Making Transportation Safety a Year-Round Priority

Transportation safety extends beyond company vehicles and traditional driving occupations. Every worker who drives to a worksite, travels between locations, or commutes home can be affected by roadway hazards. Summer provides an excellent opportunity for organizations to review fleet safety programs, reinforce defensive driving expectations, and remind employees that safe driving is an essential component of workplace safety.