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Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers
April 21, 2008

Latest Traffic Safety News

Automakers Use Technology to Keep Drivers Safe from Distracting Advancements
In-car Internet, dual-view navigation screens and 3D GPS screens are some of the newest automotive technology intended to entertain and inform drivers. “Some of this stuff is going to be terribly dangerous and some of it is going to be tremendously helpful, and probably everything in between,” a senior research scientist at the University of North Carolina said. “We have no idea, but we’re really worried.” Some systems are designed to keep drivers safe from distraction, such as Nissan’s Distance Control Assist, which uses radar sensors, a buzzer and brake and gas pedal controls to keep drivers from tailgating. Now that devices such as MP3 players and GPS work in vehicles, carmakers will focus on improving the interfaces, according to Technoride. ADAC, Germany’s automobile association, recommends that navigation screens be kept simple with clear voice commands. For more information, go to http://usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/cars-trucks/daily-news/080402-120384/
Source: U.S. News and World Report, April 2, 2008

Vehicles Must Overcome Hurdles Before Driving Themselves
About six driverless vehicles managed to complete the 60-mile course during the Darpa Urban Challenge in November, but don’t expect them to pull up into the driveway anytime soon. Optimists think they’ll be available in the 2015 or 2016 model year, but it could be 10 years after that. “You could drive your car up to the store, tell it to go find parking, and get out,” General Motors’ head of research and development said. “When you’re ready to leave, you beep the car, and it comes and picks you up.” The three main obstacles to this driverless future are equipping vehicles, getting governments to update infrastructure, and dealing with liability issues. Autonomous vehicles could reduce traffic jams and total emissions and increase road capacity, because they’d be able to travel closer together. Tests are gearing up in the United States, Europe and Japan to see how well vehicles can communicate with each other and roadside infrastructure. For more information, go to http://www.portfolio.com/culture-lifestyle/goods/cars/2008/04/02/When-Will-Cars-Drive-Themselves
Source: Conde Nast Portfolio, April 2, 2008

Next Cell Phone Ban: Walking and Talking
Illinois legislators are considering a bill that would fine pedestrians for using cell phones while crossing the street. The bill isn’t close to becoming a law, but Secretary of State Jesse White backs the concept after noticing a pattern of pedestrians on cell phones nearly being hit while walking in crosswalks. "People have to understand, a lot of people are getting injured and killed by cars in pedestrian walks," Chicago Mayor Richard Daley said. "It's a safety factor. So, like anything else, you have to use common sense if you're walking across." For more information, go to http://www.suntimes.com/news/metro/875044,CST-NWS-cross03.article Source: Chicago Sun-Times, April 3, 2008

Varnish Turns Roads Pink When Icy
French company Eurovia has developed a varnish that turns roads pink when temperatures drop below 1 °C. The technique is in the testing stage but could help prevent ice-related traffic crashes in the future. This is the first time the varnish, made of a polymer containing a thermochromic pigment, has been used to monitor road temperatures. Eurovia researchers tested the varnish by painting squares on roads across France and observed the transparent varnish turn dark pink when temperatures dropped below 1 °C and became colorless again when temperatures rose. When applied, officials will be able to tell exactly where roads needs to be salted, and motorists would see where to take extra precaution. For more information, go to http://technology.newscientist.com/channel/tech/dn13592-intelligent-paint-turns-roads-pink-in-icy-conditions.html?feedId=online-news_rss20
Source: NewScientist, April 2008

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Ford to Install Mirrors that Detect Blind Spots

Ford Motor Co. will start installing side-view mirrors that show blind spots in the outside upper corners early next year. The mirrors will debut on some Ford, Lincoln and Mercury models to start, eventually becoming standard across most of the line-up. Ford also will offer an optional radar-based blind spot warning system that will be able to scan parking lot aisles and warn of approaching vehicles when backing out of a space. The decision to install the side-view mirrors came out of research Ford conducted about customers' wants and needs. The feature is almost essential because automakers are shrinking side windows to make vehicles sleeker. The blind-spot detectors should not add to the vehicle's sticker price and might help sway buyers to choose a Ford. For more information, go to http://biz.yahoo.com/ap/080409/blind_spot_mirrors.html?.v=2 Source: The Associated Press, April 9, 2008

News from USDOT

DOT Launches Electronic Notification of Safety Recalls

Consumers now can be notified electronically of safety recalls from the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). The DOT launched the notification system for safety seat and tire recall information March 24. Consumers can register at Safercar.gov by clicking on "e-mail" or "RSS." Consumers also are advised to register safety seats and tires with manufacturers, because manufacturers can contact purchasers about recalls in a timely manner and send further instruction and information.

Drivers Urged to Slow Down in Work Zones

Acting Federal Highway Administrator Jim Ray helped kick off the ninth annual National Work Zone Awareness Week in Sacramento. "As thousands of highway repair crews head back to work this season, America's drivers must remember that a work zone is the workplace of thousands of men and women," Ray said. This year's slogan is "Slow for the Cone Zone," in recognition that motorists are four times more likely to be injured or killed in a work zone than highway workers. Drivers also are advised not to tailgate or becoming distracted by talking on a phone or texting. Work zone fatalities across the country have increased over the last decade by nearly 50 percent. More than 3,000 work zones are planned for U.S. highways by mid-summer.

Booklet Helps Consumers Compare Insurance Costs

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration developed a booklet that compares differences in insurance costs for different makes and models of various types of vehicles. The 2008 Comparison of Insurance Costs is intended to help consumers considering the purchase of a new vehicle. The booklet does not indicate a vehicle's relative safety. For a copy of the booklet, go to http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/Vehicle%20Safety/Articles/Associated%20Files/2008_Insurance_

International Traffic Safety News

UN OKs Global Conference on Road Safety

The United Nations General Assembly approved the first global UN Conference on road safety to reduce traffic deaths around the world. The UN Conference will take place in the Russian Federation in 2009. The decision is a big victory for the Make Roads Safe campaign, which has been petitioning for the meeting. "We must ensure that the UN Conference is not just another talking shop, but secures real commitments and takes real action to reverse the tide of global road deaths," UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said. More than 1.2 million people are killed and 50 million injured on the road each year. The Make Roads Safe Campaign will call for a 10-year, $300 million action plan to increase traffic safety in middle- to low-income countries.

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On-the-Job Drivers Take More Risks

Business drivers are more likely to speed and tailgate than other motorists, according to a survey by road safety charity Brake and Green Flag. Three-quarters of at-work drivers admitted to speeding, and 61 percent said they leave less than a two-second gap between their vehicle and the driver in front. Brake deduced that deadlines and other pressures are to blame. “Work pressures are not an excuse for impatient and aggressive driving,” said Brake’s head of campaigns. One fleet manager said individual driving styles are a bigger influence than company demands or lax fleet management. "Fleet managers should empower drivers to make sensible, rational decisions about their welfare whilst they are on the move, through a combination of education, information and retribution,” a DriveTech spokesman said. Source: FleetNews, April 1, 2008

Tips Help Drivers Keep a Safe Distance

Because recent research shows that at-work drivers are more likely to exhibit risky driving behaviors, Interactive Driving Systems offers several tips to reduce tailgating or being involved in a rear-end crash. They suggest drivers allow enough time to reach their destination safely, check brakes and lights on a daily basis and keep a safe following distance. If drivers are being tailgated, they should let the other driver pass when it is safe to do so. Drivers should also stay calm in traffic and slow down, especially when weather and driving conditions change.

Canadian Provinces Implement, Consider Handheld Cell Phone Bans

Manitoba is considering a ban on hand-held cell phones for drivers, but critics say the move might not go far enough because it’s the conversation, not the handset, that distracts drivers. A similar ban in Quebec and Nova Scotia recently went into effect. The Quebec coroner’s office said cell phones were to blame for 24 traffic deaths from 2000 to 2006. Manitoba is the only other Canadian providence considering a ban; Alberta wants to see how effective bans are in other locations. Alberta’s research shows that when something is outlawed people pay attention in the beginning but then revert to their old habits. Crash statistics show that since Newfoundland and Labrador’s cell phone ban went into effect in 2003, convictions climbed and distracted driving crashes have declined.
Source: The Globe and Mail, February 4, 2008

UK Corporate Manslaughter Act Spurs Companies to Review Gray Fleet Drivers

Almost three-quarters of fleets are either involved in or recently completed a review of drivers who use their own cars for business. Fleet managers are taking these steps to ensure their employees and companies are covered before the Corporate Manslaughter Act goes into effect. Nine percent of those who conducted reviews already implemented the necessary changes, according to research by Arval. “Gray fleet vehicles that are unsafe and not fit for purpose put employees and other road users at risk, so are a big concern to us,” Arval’s director said. “It’s also important to remember that a safe, well-driven fleet will be more cost effective and less environmentally damaging.” The Highway Code makes it clear that drivers are responsible for making sure their vehicles are roadworthy, maintained and insured. Gray fleet managers can get advice at the Risk in Fleet conference on April 22. Source: FleetNews, April 3, 2008

Committee to Develop Standards for Traffic Safety Management

The International Organisation for Standardisation created a committee to develop a global standard for manufacturing and using road traffic safety management systems. The standards are intended to help fleets create policies to prevent and deal with traffic crashes involving employees. Source: FleetNews, April 3, 2008

Federation Forms Global Group to Address Traffic Safety

International Federation-Washington (IRF) is forming a road safety work group to reduce fatalities and injuries on roads across the world. The team brings together experts and decision makers to share ideas, opinions and information to develop policies about pressing traffic safety issues. The approach is all inclusive to ensure IRF policy statements represent the worldwide road building industry. The statements will help inform governments and global citizens of road safety measures, policies and behaviors that will reduce crashes and save lives.
Source: World Highways April e-newsletter, April 7, 2008

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Smarter Transportation Systems Could Help Ease Congestion

Automobiles are becoming more tech-savvy, but advancements are slow when it comes to solving the problem of congestion. Traffic tie-ups produce extra emissions and waste time. The easiest way to solve the problem would be to build more roads, but that's expensive and creates more pollution and noise. Intelligent transportation systems are one way to optimize the highways that already exist. Now GPS units serve mostly as electronic maps, but their usefulness would be magnified if they could become aware of the current traffic conditions and select routes accordingly. Cell phones could be used to track vehicles and traffic. Automated vehicles also would help ease traffic by allowing more cars to pack the highway safely, and adaptive cruise control helps drivers brake more efficiently and smoothly. On the other hand, making drivers more conscientious of their surroundings so they have to pay attention to the road also improves safety. Cities that are thinking long term about their transportation systems are considering grouping residential and work environments together. For more information, go to http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/tech/hightech/traffic.html Source: CBC News, April 3, 2008

About One-Fifth of Drivers Tired and Cars Dangerous

Two new surveys have found that 20 percent of drivers don't recognize when they're driving drowsy and that 16 percent of pool cars in company fleets are un-roadworthy. "It is clear from our inspections that pool cars are often neglected or badly maintained," said the head of RAC vehicle inspections service. The British government is launching an online and radio advertising campaign, along with messaging at service stations, to combat the problem of drowsy at-work drivers. Source: FleetNews, April 7, 2008

GM Joins Road Safety Campaign

GM UK Fleet is the first vehicle manufacturer to champion the Department for Transport's Driving for Better Business road safety program. GM will promote best practices in work-related traffic safety and attend conference organized by Roadsafe to talk with other companies about their position on road safety. The campaign's goal is to reduce deaths and injuries occuring on work-related journeys. Employers are encouraged to promote health and safety legislation as part of the campaign. For more information go to www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com Source: FleetNews, April 7, 2008

EU Moves Forward with New Vehicle Safety Rules

The European Union (EU) is forging ahead with the approval of regulation that would require cars and vans sold in Europe be equipped with "brake assist" systems and meet frontal protection requirements. The initiative's goal is to force manufacturers to make vehicles safer for pedestrians. Current guidelines are voluntary.
Source: FleetNews, April 7, 2008

Tips Help Drivers Avoid Expensive Pothole Damage

Potholes have been especially plentiful this season in Canada and the United States because both countries experienced a wet winter, putting more moisture in the ground that froze and expanded, cracking the asphalt. Potholes lead to safety hazards and expensive vehicle repairs. Some tips to avoid pothole-related damage are to slow down and release the brakes before hitting one; don't swerve at the last second to avoid one; slow down; and check tire pressure regularly. Source: AutomotiveFleet, April 10, 2008

Work-Home

Young Motorcyclists Take and Tape Risks

Stunters or young motorcyclists who practice risky maneuvers on high-speed sports bikes, have become increasingly popular the past few years. Several Web sites are devoted to showing video clips of the stunts. "It's the new form of rebellion," said Dave Sonsky, editor of Super Streetbike magazine and Web site. "Instead of riding a loud chopper, you have a new generation riding these sportbikes and putting them through their paces." Supersport bikes made up less than 10 percent of the registered motorcycles but accounted for more than a quarter of motorcyclist deaths in 2005. Stunters admit that what they do is dangerous and shouldn't be attempted by people who aren't willing to put in

the practice—or the occasional trip to the emergency room. For more information, go to http://www.courierpostonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080329/NEWS01/803290345/1006
Source: Courier-Post, March 29, 2008

Canadians Not as Concerned about Older Drivers as Researchers Expect

Canadians are moderately concerned about senior drivers, the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) found. "We expected more Canadians to be concerned, particularly as the population of elderly drivers is growing," a TIRF research scientist said. Motorists 65 and older account for the second-largest proportion of road deaths, behind the teen and young adult age group. Three-quarters of Canadians believe elderly drivers should complete training courses, but the majority did not want to see their driving privileges stripped if they cause a crash. "Canadians are saying it's OK for seniors to drive, so long as they can do so safely," said a sponsor of the TIRF poll. Seniors were the least supportive of training programs and restrictions on older drivers. For more information, go to www.trafficinjuryresearch.com.

Study Finds Link Between Smoking Bans and Drunk Driving Crashes

Drunk driving crashes increased in communities that implemented indoor-smoking bans, according to researchers from the University of Wisconsin. The number of crashes increased 12 percent in communities that banned smoking in bars and restaurants, perhaps because smokers hit the road in search of bars that would allow them to smoke. The study's authors note that if the increase in drunk driving is related to the bans, officials would have to weigh the health benefits of prohibiting smoking outdoors. The study appears in the June 2008 issue of the Journal of Public Economics.
Source: JoinTogether, April 4, 2008

7 States Consider Lowering Drinking Age to 18

Lawmakers in seven states are considering legislation that would lower the legal drinking age from 21 to 18. Missouri, South Dakota, Vermont and Minnesota are looking over measures that would lower the drinking age for all residents; military-only bills have been filed in Kentucky, Wisconsin and South Carolina. Proponents say that 18-year-olds who fight for their country are mature enough to drink. One major hurdle to passing the proposals is that the age-21 drinking law is tied to a percentage of federal funding. Source: JoinTogether, April 4, 2008

Journal Articles

Law Enforcement Plays Role in Ensuring Driver Safety on the Road

Griffith R, Tengnah C. Br J Community Nurs 2007; 12(12): 574, 576-8.

Law enforcement and government agencies are ensuring that organizations comply with health and safety laws to prevent the 150 deaths and injuries that occur each week while people drive for work. The organizations also must assess the risks associated with work-related driving and implement appropriate policies. Failure to comply could result in prosecution.

Drivers Timed While Completing Tasks to See if Static Time Good Measure of Distraction

Reed-Jones J, Trick LM, Matthews M. Accid Anal Prev 2008; 40(2): 628-34

Researchers recently tested the validity of using the 15-second rule to determine whether an in-vehicle technology is too distracting. Thirty-two drivers completed two different tasks, using a radio/tape deck and dialing a cell phone, in a driving simulator. The researchers found that the device with the higher static time also produced more lane deviations and interference, but the pattern of results they predicted didn't occur for crashes and hazard response time.

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Index for Dangerous Driving Tested for Reliability, Validity

Willemsen J, Dula CS, Declercq F, Verhaeghe P. Accid Anal Prev 2008; 40(2): 798-806

Researchers compared data from a U.S. university, U.S. community and a sample of Belgian traffic offenders to establish the validity and reliability of the Dula Dangerous Driving Index (DDDI). Analysis supported a four-factor structure: Drunk Driving formed a separate scale from items for Risky Driving, Negative Cognitive/Emotional Driving and Aggressive Driving. The DDDI subscales are closely interrelated in all three samples which suggests DDDI total score can be used as a measure for dangerous driving. In the Belgian sample, traffic offender groups scored higher on corresponding scales, which shows it is clinically meaningful to differentiate the subscales.

Homicide Top Cause of Work-related Fatalities in Parking Lots

Fayard GM. J Safety Res 2008; 39(1): 9-18

Parking facilities are common across the United States, but not much is known about their safety. Researchers analyzed a dataset of parking lot fatalities from 1993 -2002 and found the most common causes of death were homicide (36 percent), contact with objects (15 percent) and pedestrian fatalities (13 percent). Most of the homicide victims knew their attackers. Administrative and environmental issues could lower the risk of homicide. Parking facility design could have an impact.

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