

Safety NETS

SPRING/SUMMER 2001

Information to help keep your employees safe on the road

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE MINNESOTA NETWORK OF EMPLOYERS FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

Beware the Aggressive Driver

You're walking along a crowded sidewalk. Someone in front of you is moving slowly and you're in a hurry. Do you scream at the person to get out of your way? Follow within inches of their heels until they move aside? Dart around them without warning and immediately slow down in front of them? Odds are, you'd simply wait for a break in the crowd and step around them. Why, then, don't we behave as courteously when we're driving?

Inside our cars, under the cloak of anonymity, we're different. We yell, make rude gestures, blast our horns, flash our high beams, and sometimes make risky maneuvers just to teach someone a lesson. Our behavior becomes beastly, and that's when disaster can occur.

You may remember when three people were killed during the morning commute in suburban Washington, D.C. One car cut off another and a speed duel ensued, resulting in a terrible crash. Two of the victims were not even involved in the duel. They were on the other side of the road.

On any given day you can talk to anyone from anywhere and hear a tale of a recent battle on the road, as fresh as the memory of that morning's commute. What causes this dangerous behavior? Some say risk-taking is encouraged by new automobile safety features, such

as ABS, reinforced doors and air bags. Others feel the perception of added security offered by large pickup trucks or sport utility vehicles makes people feel they are "kings/queens of the road."

Yet another factor, and possibly the key contributor in aggressive driving incidents, is that there are 17 percent more passenger cars and trucks on American roads than there were 10 years ago, while the number of drivers is up 10 percent. Furthermore, the number of miles driven has increased 35 percent since 1987, while only 1 percent more roads have been built. Roads are more crowded, days are more hectic and people are more stressed!

Aggressive driving behavior doesn't just happen. It's the result of everyday stressors. We're late for a meeting. We had a bad day at work. We're in a rush to pick up our kids at day care. We're stuck in traffic. All this leads to stress and frustration that can result in even the most polite person becoming a beast!

With roads continuing to get more crowded, it's unlikely the aggressive driving situation will improve unless we all change our attitudes and take our good office manners with us on the road.

Source: *Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS)*

National Buckle Up America Week — May 21-28

For fact sheets, flyers, posters and suggested activities related to Buckle Up America Week, contact Lisa Kons by phone at 800-444-9150 or 651-228-7330; or e-mail her at kons@mnsafetycouncil.org. You can also check our Web site at www.mnsc.org/nets.

The Five Types of Aggressive Drivers

Speeder: They believe in arriving at their destination in a self-prescribed time frame. Any deviation from that time frame results in anger, and it is directed at whomever caused the delay.

Competitor: These drivers believe self-esteem is gained or maintained by “beating the other driver” in some self-created contest on the road. Consequently, they become angry when the other driver appears to win this contest. Their anger may provoke these drivers to race the other driver, merge first into an exit lane and other actions.

Passive/Aggressor: Passive/aggressive drivers feel they lose status if they give in and allow faster or demanding drivers to have their way. These drivers may even think they are serving society by refusing to give more aggressive drivers a break, but in reality they are causing more problems than they prevent.

Narcissist: These people believe that if other drivers, vehicles and highway activities don't measure up to their unrelenting standards, they should be banned from the road. Anger erupts when these types of drivers observe an infraction of their self-created standards.

Vigilante: These drivers act as police officer, judge and jury. They believe they have the right to punish drivers whose behavior annoys, threatens or inconveniences them. Anger escalates and punishment is delivered through running the other vehicle off the road, obscene gestures, screaming or worse.

If You Are Confronted by an Aggressive Driver

- First and foremost, make every attempt to get out of the way.
- Breathe. Stay calm and relaxed. Remember that reaching your destination safely and calmly is your goal.
- Put your pride in the back seat. Do not challenge the aggressive driver by speeding up or attempting to “hold your own” in your travel lane.
- Wear your seat belt. It will hold you in your seat and behind the wheel in case you need to make an abrupt driving maneuver, and it will protect you in a crash.
- Avoid eye contact—some people take eye contact as a challenge and will use it as an excuse to escalate their aggressive behavior.
- Ignore gestures and refuse to return them.
- Report aggressive drivers to the appropriate authorities by providing a vehicle description, license number, location and, if possible, direction of travel.
- Aggressive driving is against the law—if you have a mobile phone and can use it safely, call the police.
- If an aggressive driver is involved in a crash farther down the road, stop a safe distance from the crash scene, wait for the police to arrive and report the driving behavior that you witnessed.

Source: *Minnesota Department of Public Safety, Office of Traffic Safety*

Preliminary national and state traffic statistics for the year 2000 are now available. In Minnesota, 626 deaths were reported, the same number as in 1999. Injuries totaled 44,724 compared with 44,538 in 1999. Total number of crashes jumped from 96,813 in 1999 to 103,563 in 2000. Nationally, traffic fatality rates increased in 2000 after hitting a record low the previous year. The percentage of alcohol-related deaths remained steady at 38 percent. The number of people injured remained about the same at 3.2 million.

