

## The Problem of Impaired Driving in Minnesota

(And what you can do about it)

Impaired driving incidents increased 8% in Minnesota in 2005 (latest data available), totaling 36,870. Alcohol-related crashes claimed the lives of 197 people and injured 3,571 more in 2005. The cost of all alcohol-related crashes that year is estimated conservatively at \$310 million (National Safety Council).

Young workers in their prime are disproportionately involved in impaired driving offenses. Adults aged 21 to 34 committed 52% of the incidents recorded in 2005. Fifteen-to-thirty-four year-olds accounted for 47% of the alcohol-related deaths. Males made up 70% of the DWI offenders.

What's the impact on employers? Aside from the obvious issues related to driving impaired on the job, or the aftermath of a crash off-the-job, your business could be affected by countless other problems that alcohol (and other drug abuse) can cause. Most individuals who abuse alcohol and other drugs are employed, and when they arrive for work, they bring their problems with them.

A Hazelden Foundation survey found that more than 60 percent of adults know someone who has reported for work under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. In a Department of Health and Human Services survey, the highest rates of illicit drug use and heavy drinking were reported by food preparation workers, waiters, waitresses and bartenders; construction workers; service occupations; and transportation and material moving workers.

Some of the costs of impaired workers are obvious, such as increased absences, injuries and

errors. Others, such as low morale, high illness rates and high turnover, are less so, but the effects are equally harmful. Small businesses may be particularly vulnerable to these issues. They are less likely to have programs in place to combat the problem, and the cost of just one error caused by an impaired employee can devastate a small company.

What can you do? The workplace is a proven environment for influencing behavior—and for many of your workers it may be the only place they will receive information about alcohol abuse and impaired driving. Use the following resources to write a newsletter article, plan a “brown bag” lunch session or find materials suitable for posting.

- Free impaired driving prevention resources are available on the Minnesota NETS Web site, including brochures, payroll stuffers, a script for a safety talk, fact sheets, alcohol-free drink recipes and Minnesota-specific statistics. See <http://www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/nets/impaireddriving.htm>.
- The U.S. Department of Labor's “Working Partners for an Alcohol and Drug-Free Workplace” program offers numerous resources online at <http://www.dol.gov/workingpartners/> and offers a section on impaired driving at [http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/drugs/workingpartners/sp\\_iss/idhome.asp](http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/drugs/workingpartners/sp_iss/idhome.asp).
- *Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes* is a joint publication of federal OSHA, the national Network of Employers for Traffic Safety and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. It's available at [http://www.osha.gov/Publications/motor\\_vehicle\\_guide.html](http://www.osha.gov/Publications/motor_vehicle_guide.html).

NOTE: The winter driving fact sheet on the next page can be posted or copied and handed out to your employees.





### Tips for Safe Winter Driving

- Buckle up, driver sober and alert, and at a safe and legal speed.
- Regardless of season, you should inspect your tires at least once a month and always before embarking on a long road trip — it only takes about five minutes.
- Drive slowly. It's harder to control or stop your vehicle on a slick or snow-covered surface. On the road, increase your following distance so you'll have plenty of time to stop for vehicles ahead of you.
- Know what kind of brakes your vehicle has and how to use them properly. In general, if you have anti-lock brakes apply firm pressure, if you have non anti-lock brakes, pump the brakes gently.
- If you find yourself in a skid, stay calm and ease your foot off the gas while carefully steering in the direction you want the front of your vehicle to go. This procedure, known as "steering into the skid," will bring the back end of your car in line with the front.
- Plan ahead. Check the weather, road conditions, and traffic; plan to leave early if necessary. Familiarize yourself with directions and maps before you go, and let others know your route and anticipated arrival time.

- Keep your gas tank close to full. If you get stuck in a traffic jam or in snow, you might need more fuel to get home or keep warm. Note: To avoid carbon monoxide poisoning when stuck in snow, be sure to keep your vehicle's exhaust pipe clear of snow and ice, run your vehicle only in the open with the windows partially down, and run it only long enough to keep warm.
- If road conditions are hazardous, avoid driving if possible. Wait until road and weather conditions improve before heading out.
- Carry a winter survival kit and items to handle common winter driving tasks. For tips on items to include in a kit, see <http://www.minnesotasafetycouncil.org/facts/factsheet.cfm?FS=26> or search for "Blizzard Bucket."

Keep the following on hand:

- Snow shovel, broom, and ice scraper.
- Abrasive material, such as sand or kitty litter, in case your vehicle gets stuck in the snow.
- Jumper cables, flashlight and warning devices, such as flares and markers.
- Blankets for protection from the cold.
- A cell phone, water, food, and any necessary medicine (for longer trips or when driving in lightly populated areas).
- If you're stopped or stalled in wintry weather, stay with your car and don't overexert yourself.
- Put bright markers on the antenna or windows and keep the interior dome light turned on.

Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration