



ACCESSING SAFETY KNOWLEDGE (ASK) SHEET: *DRIVING STANDARD*

How does safe driving relate to construction job safety? This question has taken a whole new meaning, given that many people must get to their projects from home, often driving long distances during early hours. There are many hazards on the road during this time that directly affect workers' safety. Alcohol and drugs, fatigue and distracted driving not only affect the person driving, but other drivers on the road as well. It is important to be alert while driving and to what the other drivers are doing on the road.

Alcohol and Drugs

Drug and alcohol use — and misuse of certain prescription medications — make for unsafe road conditions, and the dangers can lurk at any time of day. The National Institute on Drug Abuse notes that, in 2018, 20.5 million people ages 16 or older reported driving under the influence of alcohol in the previous year, while 12.6 million reported driving under the influence of illegal drugs. Such behavior not only endangers the drivers partaking in drugs and/or alcohol, but their passengers, others on the road and those in the general vicinity.

Although pinpointing exact effects various substances have on drivers can be difficult since users often use multiple drugs or drink alcohol along with them, The National Institute on Drug Abuse does describe some general effects:

- Alcohol:** Reduced coordination, concentration and response time, drowsiness, lane weaving and difficulty steering
- Cocaine and Methamphetamine:** Aggressive, reckless behavior
- Marijuana:** Lane weaving, poor reaction time, altered attention to the road, decreased coordination
- Opioids:** Drowsiness, impaired thinking, impaired judgment
- Prescription Medicines (Such as Benzodiazepines and Opioids):** Drowsiness, dizziness, impaired thinking, impaired judgment

Not all vehicular accidents are related to drug and alcohol use. Still, [a report issued by the Governors Highway Safety Association](#) indicates that, in 2016, 44% of fatally injured drivers with known test results did test positive for drugs. That's an increase from the 28% reported 10 years before. It is crucial for all drivers — including and especially those who do not partake in drugs and alcohol before hitting the road — to remain alert behind the wheel. Doing so could mean the difference between life and death.

Fatigue

Several factors can lead to fatigued or drowsy driving directly, from new medications, to long shifts at work and even a simple lack of sleep. No matter the cause, drowsy driving can lead to dangerous situations. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that up to 6,000 fatal accidents each year could be caused by drowsy driving — and that studies show an estimated one in 25 adult drivers has reported falling asleep behind the wheel in the past 30 days. In less extreme instances, drowsy drivers can experience slower reaction times, display less awareness of hazards and a lower attention span — and also veer from their lanes.

Fatigued driving can particularly become a problem when projects lead teams to work overtime. Managers should be aware of the dangers and should work with teams to encourage safe practices on the road. The CDC offers tips for preventing fatigued driving:

- Get an adequate amount of sleep. Adults typically need at least seven hours of sleep, while teens need at least eight hours.
- Develop healthy sleeping habits, such as creating (and sticking to) a sleep schedule.
- Talk to a doctor if you have a sleep disorder, or if you begin displaying symptoms that lead you to believe you might have one.
- Avoid alcohol or medications that lead to drowsiness. Consult the label on your medications or talk with your pharmacist to learn more.

Texting and Driving

We live in a technology-driven world, and cell phones are continually becoming a bigger part of our day-to-day lives. As a result, texting behind the wheel has become an increasing safety hazard. In fact, the U.S. Department of Transportation notes that 9% of fatal crashes in 2017 were distraction-affected, with 3,166 people killed in motor vehicles crashes. Meanwhile, EndDD.org states that more than 84% of drivers say they recognize the danger of cell phone distractions and find texting or emailing while driving to be unacceptable — but 36% of those same people admit to having done so within the previous month.

Encourage your team members to pull to the side of the road if they must check or send a message — and remain cautious, as other drivers might be practicing unsafe behaviors. UC Davis Health also offers this advice to help discourage texting while driving:

- Keep your phone out of reach.
- Use an app to block incoming texts or calls. Some apps allow you to send an auto response to let the sender know you are driving and will respond when able.
- If using your phone for navigational purposes, mount it to the dashboard.
- Make a commitment to not use your phone while driving.

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P.O. Box 924943 • Houston, Texas 77292 • ☎ 281.679.1877 • F 281.403.6302 • asahouston.org • asa@asahouston.org

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