



Risk Management Committee



TO :

FROM : National Wildfire Coordinating Group

REPLY TO : NWCG@nifc.gov

DATE : 08/24/2006

SUBJECT : SAFETY ADVISORY : Driving Safety



Driving Safety.doc



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To: All Personnel
From: National Multi Agency Coordinating Group
Subject: Driving Safety

A quick review of the 2006 Wildland fire safety data shows this has been difficult year for accidents, and most particularly for motor vehicle related accidents. Since March of this year there have been close to a dozen incidents, including four in the last two weeks. Incredibly, these accidents reveal that many firefighters are still not wearing their seatbelts.

The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) would like to emphasize that driving is one of the most hazardous tasks in which firefighters engage. Because most of us drive every day, we tend to normalize the dangers involved. Add to that the stress of emergency response and cumulative fatigue and the risk of serious accidents increases.

Much has been written about how to ensure safe driving, but nothing is more succinct and comprehensive than the driving lesson in 6 minutes for safety. To help stem the rash of vehicle related accidents, we are asking all firefighting agencies to use Tuesday the 22nd of August as a time to review this six minutes for safety lesson plan. The lesson is attached to this memo, or can be found at http://www.nifc.gov/sixminutes/dsp_discussion.php?id=172.

We are now in our eighth straight month of high activity fire and significant ground and aviation operations. Please take the time to review, reinforce, and reiterate the practices that keep us safe on the road, in the air, and on the fireline. Please keep the remainder of your season safe and productive.

/s/ Tom Boatner
Chair, NMAC



**Today's discussion is from the
Miscellaneous Category.**

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DRIVING SAFETY

Driving is one of the most hazardous tasks that we perform when assigned to fires. Because of the fact that we perform the task literally hundreds of times in the course of our daily lives we tend to take it for granted. Based on recent accident trends, vehicle accidents are the source of more deaths and serious injuries to wildland firefighters than any other single cause. Vehicle operators need to recognize their own poor driving habits and strive to develop proper defensive driving techniques.

- A good starting point is attitude. A positive attitude towards improving your defensive driving skills will help you achieve the necessary changes in your driving habits. Most of what you do in operating vehicles is performed from habit. You do not consciously think about every thing you do when you drive. Rather, your subconscious performs most techniques. It's important to remember that a bad habit is as easy to develop as a good one. Take a good, hard look at your driving habits. Are you training yourself to do the right things the right way, like fastening your seat belt, checking your mirrors, and maintaining safe following distances?

- Inattentiveness is a major contributing factor in motor vehicle accidents within the wildland firefighting community. Because driving is such a common component of our lives, it is difficult to realize that it requires 100% of our attention. Since the average adult attention span is 15-20 minutes we must develop techniques that allow us to refocus our attention on the task at hand, operating a motor vehicle safely. There are many forms of inattentive driving; fatigue, telematics, daydreaming, eating, drinking, reading, writing, and talking. Here are some techniques for maintaining your attention while driving.
 - Drive only when you are well rested and alert; avoid driving during the hours of 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM. Take a 10 to 15 minute break after every 2 hours of driving.
 - Practice situational awareness when driving; be aware of what is happening in front, behind, and on both sides of your vehicle. Never drive when taking medications that make you drowsy.
 - Avoid using cell phones, radios, GPS units, CD players or computers while driving. Have a passenger operate them, or pull off the road and park.
 - By constantly moving your vision, checking mirrors and distant road conditions, you can avoid highway hypnosis and daydreaming.
 - Avoid eating or drinking while driving. Take frequent breaks to perform these activities.
 - Do not attempt to read maps or write directions while driving, pull over and park.
 - When talking with passengers, keep your eyes on the road and both hands on the steering wheel. Keep conversations casual and limited to small talk. Avoid conversations of a serious or technical nature. Do not engage in confrontational or argumentative conversations.
 - Do not be in a hurry, be patient. The more impatient you are, the more agitated you can become. Agitation will only magnify other inattentive driving behaviors.

- Safe driving starts with a safe vehicle. While mechanical failure is rarely a contributing factor in motor vehicle accidents something as simple as under inflated tires can have serious consequences. Before operating any vehicle, you must be sure the vehicle is in safe operating condition. Not only should you perform a pre-operation inspection, some vehicle defects can