

How to Talk Turkey About Impaired Driving

December is National Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month and Mothers Against Drunk Driving's (MADD) Tie One On for Safety event occurs between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, during which time more than 1,000 people die in traffic accidents nationally. What better time to talk to employees about impaired driving?

National Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month is sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which says that during December everyone should consider what he or she can personally do to stop impaired driving as well as what can be done by communities to make streets and highways safe from impaired drivers.

Tie One On for Safety is sponsored by MADD, which says, "During November and December, spirits are high, celebrations abound and travel increases on America's roadways. Unfortunately, drunk driving is usually on the rise as well."

OSHA reports that 40 percent of fatal traffic accidents involve impairment due to alcohol or drugs. An average of one alcohol-related fatality occurs on America's roads every 30 minutes. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) says that 3 of every 10 Americans will be involved in an impaired-driving-related crash at some time in their lives. And research shows that alcohol is a contributing factor in 39 percent of all work-related crashes.

It's been estimated that motor vehicle accidents cost employers \$60 billion annually. The average crash costs \$16,500, and when a worker has an on-the-job traffic accident that results in an injury, the cost can go as high as \$74,000. When a worker dies in a traffic accident, costs can exceed \$500,000.

Alcohol, Drugs, and Driving

Teach your workers that the three most critical skills necessary for safe driving, according to the National Commission Against Drunk Driving (NCADD), are:

- Judgment
- Vision
- Reaction

Drugs and alcohol impair all three. And a person doesn't even have to be legally drunk to be impaired. NCADD emphasizes that driving skills can be impaired at levels well below the legal limit.

The effect alcohol or drugs have on a person depends on many factors besides consumption. Impairment also can depend on:

- Food consumption
- Metabolism
- Mood
- Fatigue

Driving Safety Tips for the Holidays

Here are some safe driving tips from NHTSA that your employees can use to protect themselves and their families on the road this holiday season and all year around:

- **Plan ahead.** Always designate a nondrinking driver before any holiday party or celebration begins.
- **Take the keys.** Don't let friends drive if they are impaired.
- **Be a helpful host.** If you're hosting a party, remind guests to plan ahead and designate their driver before the drinking begins. Offer alcohol-free beverages. And make sure all of your guests leave with a sober driver or take a taxi home.
- **Report drunk drivers.** If you encounter a driver on the road who appears to be impaired, keep your distance and report the problem to the state police. That's the best way to get dangerous drivers off the road before they hurt themselves or someone else.

Spotting a Drunk Driver

According to the NCADD, if you see a car doing any of the following things, there may be a drunk driver behind the wheel:

- Weaving (across center lane, shoulder lane)
- Swerving
- Almost striking a vehicle or other object
- Making unusually wide turns
- Driving without headlights at night
- Driving in opposing lanes or the wrong way on a one-way street
- Responding slowly to traffic signals (slow start, fast stop)
- Driving substantially below the speed limit
- Accelerating or varying speed for no reason
- Stopping for no apparent reason