

Summer driving

Summer driving brings unique driving challenges: more vehicles on the road, more children playing outside, more tractors, caravans, cyclists and motorbikes. Journey times are longer and traffic jams more likely.

Those who manage drivers need to be aware of these issues and work schedules should be planned accordingly. As well as planning journeys for the eventuality of holiday traffic jams, there needs to be a focus on vehicle condition and detailed information should be provided to drivers on allergies, preventing fatigue and minimising glare from the sun.

The following information should prove useful for managers to communicate to drivers and maintenance teams.

Vehicle maintenance

Maintaining vehicles in summer is as important as any other time of year. Check vehicle coolant levels and ensure that air conditioning is working effectively.

Windscreen smears caused by insects can impair visibility so windscreens need to be kept clean. Make sure washer bottles are kept full and that additional bottle of screen wash are kept in the vehicle.

Checking tyres for damage and tread depth is also very important as hot weather increases the risk of puncture and sudden summer showers can leave road surfaces flooded or slippery.

Allergy time

Hay fever causes itchy and watery eyes, blocked and running noses, and sneezing, which can cause a real distraction to drivers.

Advise affected drivers to use non-drowsy antihistamines such as Loratadine and Cetirizine, and keep a good supply of tissues should in the cabin. Dehydration can make symptoms worse so a bottle of water should be kept in the vehicle.

Managers should also ensure that drivers:

- Regularly vacuum the vehicle cab to remove pollen
- Are provided with weather warnings when pollen counts are expected to be high
- Provide vehicle purifiers and ionisers to reduce pollen particles in the vehicle cab

The Country Code

Remind your drivers to be careful near tractors. They do not need indicators for daytime driving and can turn unexpectedly. They can also have frontloaders so overtaking may take longer than expected. They should keep in mind that the mud tractors leave on the road can be extremely slippery after rain.

Drivers should also be reminded to take care around caravans by allowing enough space and being patient.

Warm weather fatigue

Your drivers are more likely to feel fatigued in warmer summer months. Tachograph controls will dictate that commercial vehicle drivers take regular breaks. For those who drive vehicles without a tachograph, 20 minute breaks (which can include a 15 minute nap) should be taken 2 hours, even within a 3 hour journey. Drivers should know that regular short breaks are better than one long stop.

Drivers should be advised to avoid eating a heavy meal before driving (chewing gum can stop yawning) and to drink a cup of coffee when necessary.

Avoid the glare

Glare from the sun can cause road accidents. Wearing the correct sunglasses can help reduce glare and keep the drivers seeing clearly. It is recommended that your drivers have their eyes tested by an optician every 2 years. If a driver requires prescription lenses their sunglasses should also have the same prescription lenses.

Some lenses in sunglasses are not suitable for use by drivers. Class 4 lenses let through little light and are not suitable for driving use. Class 1, 2 and 3 lenses let through adequate light for use in the day but not at night and Class 0 lenses have no limitations but have over 80% light transmission. Managers should check that drivers have the correct type of lenses in their sunglasses. Design features like deep arms should also be avoided as they obstruct periphery vision.

Summary of key points

Driving in the summer introduces hazards for your drivers in the same way as winter driving can have its unique challenges. It is recommended that managers raise the awareness of their drivers on the issues highlighted in this guidance note.

Managers should advise the following action:

Consider the chance of traffic jams caused by holidaymakers when journey planning

Check that drivers who need corrected vision have sunglasses that have prescription lenses tinted to an acceptable standard

Talk to drivers without tachographs about taking additional breaks and remind professional drivers about fatigue prevention techniques

Look at vehicle maintenance and inspection regimes from a summer driving viewpoint and check that air conditioning systems are working effectively

Monitor pollen count forecasts and work with drivers to ensure they are best placed to control the effects of hay fever

Following this guidance note can help you prevent driving at work accidents by keeping your drivers focused on the road through managing vehicles, fatigue and allergy reactions effectively.