



# Fleet Administration Quarterly Newsletter

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IN THIS ISSUE

## Drowsy Driving: What You Can Do

by National Safety Council

### What is Drowsy Driving?

Drowsy driving, or fatigued driving, occurs when a person is driving while feeling tired, drowsy, fatigued, or less than fully alert. More than 37% of Americans admit to dozing off behind the wheel.<sup>1</sup> But impairment due to drowsy driving occurs far before you doze off.

Drowsy driving is often compared to driving under the influence of alcohol because of similar performance effects. A person who is drowsy or fatigued may experience decreased vigilance and response time, putting them at increased risk for crashes.

### What Causes Drowsy Driving?

Drowsy driving occurs when a driver is tired or fatigued. Fatigue could be acquired prior to driving, or developed during the drive. There are several causes of fatigue and drowsy driving including sleep loss, time of day, and time on task.

#### 1. Sleep Loss

Driving performance can decrease when we get less than the recommended seven hours of sleep a day. In fact, driving after sleeping only 5 to 6 hours a day nearly doubles your risk of crashing.

#### 2. Time of Day

Time of day also affects our ability to drive safely. Research consistently shows that night time driving puts you at greater risk of crashing compared to daytime driving. This is due to our circadian rhythm which is our body's natural body clock that regulates our sleep-wake cycle.

#### 3. Time on Task

Time on task fatigue develops when we do the same task for extended periods of time. It is difficult to remain attentive and vigilant while conducting the same behaviors for extended periods of time and driving often involves repetitive, sedentary behaviors. Some may refer to this as highway hypnosis.

### What Are the Signs?

Humans cannot always recognize their own fatigue, but there are signs to look for to determine whether or not you are alert enough to drive. A driver experiencing the following signs of drowsiness should pull over and rest:

- Drooping, heavy eyelids or frequent blinking
- Yawning repeatedly or rubbing your eyes
- Daydreaming or wandering thoughts

*Continued on Page 3*



Photo from CDC.gov

### Updated County Fleet Policy

Improved focus on safety Page 2

### Dangers of Driving Into Sun

Beware of Glare Page 2

### Departments Collaborate

Working Together Page 3

### Specialty Equipment

Light Bars Page 3

### Tips For Cold Weather Driving

Cold is coming Page 4

# Updated County Fleet Policy

by Brian Reynolds

On September 18<sup>th</sup> Smith County Commissioners approved an updated fleet policy. This policy will become part of the employee handbook and will be available on the Smith County employee website on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

Smith County operates approximately 300 vehicles on East Texas roadways and our number one focus is to minimize the risks to our staff while traveling millions of miles each year. While it is not possible to eliminate all risks associated with driving, a good policy and clear expectations will certainly help.



One of the changes to the policy are driver qualifications. While a valid drivers license has always been an obvious requirement, some repeat violations or serious infractions have been outlined as disqualifications from driving County vehicles. Specifically:

1. Employee must have a valid Texas drivers license for the type of vehicle to be operated.
2. Employee must be 18 years of age with two years minimum driving experience.
3. Employee cannot have any combination of more than three moving violations or at fault accidents in 36 months.
4. Employee cannot have any of the following convictions in the previous 36 months
  - A) Alcohol- and drug-related violations, including operating under the influence of intoxicating liquor, narcotic, or dangerous drugs, implied consent violations, including BAC (Blood Alcohol Content)
  - B) Vehicle used in commission of a felony
  - C) Eluding or attempting to elude a law enforcement officer
  - D) Operating with revoked or suspended license
  - E) Homicide or manslaughter with a vehicle

Additional clarifications were made to the process for handling collisions and crashes. The County will establish an accident review board and will review the facts surrounding accidents to determine whether our employee is responsible and/or whether the accident was preventable. (An investigation is conducted by the Sheriff for SO staff under the SO policy.)

Distracted driving is the leading cause of crashes and contributes to thousands of deaths on American highways every year. In an effort to keep our employees safe, policy now states that cell phones and mobile devices are prohibited while driving a County vehicle.

The updated policy also clarifies Smith County's zero tolerance for operating a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. These can include some prescription drugs which can impair a drivers ability to operate a vehicle safely. Any employee that is taking prescription medications should notify their supervisor as directed in the employee handbook.

The progressive discipline policy for preventable vehicle collisions was carefully reviewed and the result is actually a reduction in the penalties for collisions in County vehicles. Previously, the first offense of a preventable collision resulted in a ten (10) day suspension without pay. The new policy reduces that to a written warning and potential unpaid suspension for one to three (1-3) days. Second offense is reduced from fifteen (15) days to three to five (3-5) days with defensive driving required.

The updated policy does maintain that three preventable accidents will result in termination although the time frame for tracking accidents has been reduced to three years.

Questions on the policy can be directed to HR or Fleet Administration.



## DANGERS OF DRIVING INTO SUN

FROM: [WWW.EXCHANGE.AAA.COM](http://WWW.EXCHANGE.AAA.COM)



Driving on a beautiful sunny day can provide stunning scenery, but it can also create a hazard if the driver's view is compromised by a glaring sun.

Just after sunrise and before sunset the sun can

*Brian Reynolds*

shine directly into drivers' eyes, leaving many motorists driving with a glare. This glare can make it harder to see the road ahead and potential hazards creating an added risk to drivers. When glare is an issue slow down and use extra caution especially while driving through school zones.

So how can you protect yourself? AAA offers these tips for motorists when driving into the sun:

- Invest in polarized sunglasses – they can help reduce glare.
- Utilize your sun visor – it can help to block out the sun.
- Leave more following room – when the sun is in your eyes it can be hard to see what the car ahead is doing. This is one more time when it pays to leave more room between you and the next vehicle.
- Drive with your headlights on to increase your visibility to other drivers

Additional tips:

- Keep your windshield clean, inside and out
- Check your windshield for pitting and cracks
- Avoid storing papers or other items on the dashboard
- If having a difficult time seeing the road, use lane markings to help guide you.

Rarely will visibility be absolutely perfect while driving, but if motorists know this and make the proper adjustments, you can minimize any additional risks that come with less-than-optimal visual conditions.

# Fleet and Departments Collaborate on Equipment

by Brian Reynolds

On October 30<sup>th</sup> several departments joined Fleet Administration at a vendor expo event hosted by Texas DPS at the DPS Emergency Vehicle Operations Course and training center in Florence. Dozens of vendors were displaying various types of equipment that is used in law enforcement vehicles and vehicle manufacturers had current model police package cars, trucks, and motorcycles available for test drives.

Various vehicles in the Smith County fleet require additional equipment to be useful to their departments. Police vehicles are particularly complicated as there are many additions made once the vehicle itself is purchased. Lighting, siren, camera system, radio(s), and a securely mounted computer are all necessary components. The pieces that these components mount to are carefully developed to fit properly and to avoid interfering with airbags, driver's controls, or impede the officers sight while driving.

All this equipment also needs to be connected and powered within the vehicle. Adding this much equipment can create havoc with a vehicles electrical system, not to mention require hundreds of connections and changes to factory wiring. To avoid damaging the vehicles original factory wiring harnesses, a separate fuse box and wiring harness can be added to the vehicle that keeps all the added equipment separate from the OEM systems.

Smith County CIO Don Bell, Sheriff Larry Smith, Constable Jeff McClenny, and other law enforcement officials spent the day in Florence to review many available pieces of equipment. By understanding the capabilities of the current technology, the departments can work together to identify cost effective ways to equip our vehicles with tools that will keep officers and drivers safe on the road and provide the latest technology to aid the officers that spend many hours in the vehicles.

Working together, the departments will also seek ways to standardize much of the technology and equipment in our vehicles to save money and make maintenance and repairs less costly and time consuming.



## DROWSY DRIVING

CONTINUED FROM P. 1

- Nodding or trouble keeping your head up
- Drifting from your lane, tailgating, or hitting a shoulder rumble strip

### HOW CAN I AVOID DROWSY DRIVING?

Everyone experiences fatigue during the day which makes avoiding drowsy driving difficult, but understanding the causes of fatigue and knowing what to do if you find yourself driving while drowsy, can help keep you safe.

### THESE TIPS WILL HELP YOU AVOID DROWSY DRIVING:

- Get at least seven hours of sleep a day, especially if you will be driving
- Avoid driving if you've been awake for 16 hours or more
- Take breaks at least every 2 hours of driving
- Do not drive after consuming alcohol or medications that may cause drowsiness

If you find yourself on the road and feeling tired, pull over to a safe location and park. Take a 20-minute nap or make other arrangements to get to your destination. Caffeine can help promote alertness but may only help for a short period of time, so it's best not to rely on caffeine.

## Specialty Equipment

by Brian Reynolds

Lights and sirens on emergency vehicles are designed to alert motorists that an emergency vehicle is present, and to give space to the first responders that are doing their jobs. Modern emergency vehicle lighting can be configured to the vehicle so that many functions are automated. Putting the vehicle in park or opening a door can automatically activate certain light functions. Photocells can dim the rear facing lights so following vehicles aren't blinded during a pursuit. Light bars can cost over \$2,500.



# Tips for Cold Weather Driving

By Brian Reynolds

## Prepare your vehicle

Make sure the vehicle is current on all maintenance and always travel with at least a half tank of gas. The tires should be checked for wear regularly and always be certain they are properly inflated. Remember, tires lose air pressure in cold weather.

When temperatures drop, so does battery power. It takes more battery power to start your car in cold weather. For electric and hybrid-electric vehicles, the driving range can be reduced when the battery is cold as well. Be sure the battery, belts, and charging system is in good shape before driving in cold weather.

Antifreeze level and all components should be checked before traveling in the cold. You may not know it, but your heat relies on the vehicles cooling system.

## Don't Warm Up a Car in an Enclosed Space

Modern cars really don't require a "warm up" period other than a few seconds to get the oil flowing through the engine. If you want to warm up your vehicle for your comfort, never

do so in an enclosed area such as a garage or carport. Carbon monoxide can be deadly.

## Clear the Windows

Frost or snow on windows obscures your vision and is a factor in many accidents in colder weather. You need to see! Take a few minutes to clear the windows before driving.

## Slow Down

It's harder to control or stop your vehicle on a slick or snow-covered surface. On the road, increase your following distance enough so that you'll have plenty of time to stop for vehicles ahead of you.

## Be Mindful of Bridges

Bridges typically freeze before the ground level pavement. When crossing bridges you should avoid sudden movements and maintain a constant speed as much as possible.

## Pack some supplies

It is a good idea to maintain a pair of jumper cables, a pair of gloves, and a light blanket in the car if traveling in the cold. It's never a bad idea to be prepared "just in case".

## Increase Following Distance

While driving in a snowstorm or any weather, it is always best to keep ample distance between your vehicle and the one ahead. This way you have more time to react to any sudden moves or stalls by other vehicles. Even if you are an expert driver, they may not be as prepared or capable as you are.

## Plan Your Route

It's always a good idea to plan your route ahead of time and to let someone know where you are planning to be. In cold weather seasons, check the weather and road conditions ahead of time and allow plenty of time to get to your destination safely.

## Avoid Risky Driving Behaviors

Don't text or allow yourself to be distracted while driving.

Obey posted speed limits and be prepared to stop quickly and safely.

Drive sober and avoid prescriptions that may affect your ability to safely operate the vehicle.

## Fleet Administration Quarterly Newsletter

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Smith County government is composed of 48 departments, including 26 headed by elected officials, with the county auditor having been appointed by the District Judges, and 12 appointees by the Commissioners Court. Smith County has approximately 800 staff positions.

County services and responsibilities include:

- Building and maintaining county roads.
- Operating the Judicial system.
- Registering voters and holding elections.
- Maintaining public records.
- Participation in economic development incentive and programs.
- Providing health and social services to the indigent.
- Assisting Veterans and their dependents w/ benefit/entitlement claims
- Providing law enforcement.
- Building and operating jails.
- Issuing vehicle registrations.
- Collection of property and sales taxes

Fleet Administration was formed as a department in 2017 to administer the Smith County fleet policies and manage the vehicle assets and related equipment. As a support department Fleet Administration is responsible to ensure that the delegated Smith County funds provide the vehicle resources that will help all departments serve the community with excellence.