In this issue of the Safety & Loss Prevention Outlook newsletter, we’ll take an in-depth look at the new Florida texting law that state troopers hope will make the roadways a little safer this holiday season. Did you also know the maximum speed limit in Florida may increase in 2014? Details on the proposed bill are inside.

Did you know the maximum speed limit in Florida may increase?

Two Florida lawmakers recently proposed a bill that would increase the speed limit on Florida Interstate roadways and other roads from 70 mph to 75 mph, according to the November 12th Sun-Sentinel online newspaper.

The proposed bill (SB392), which was filed by Senators Brandes and Clemens, would increase the maximum allowable speed limit to 75 mph under the jurisdiction of the Department of Transportation. If passed, the law will take effect on July 1, 2014.

The State of Florida Loss Prevention Program will be following this bill as it moves along the legislative process. We will also continue to provide updates in our Safety & Loss Prevention Outlook newsletter on the impact this law will have on roadway safety in Florida.
Although texting while driving is extremely dangerous, people every day across the United States—from adults to teens—continue to text while driving despite the dangers. In fact, a church in Alabama addressed the problem of texting while driving with a popular billboard that displayed the message, “Honk if you love Jesus; text while driving if you want to meet him.” On a more academic note, a study from the McGowan School of Business at King’s College concluded that roughly four out of five college students read or sent texts while driving, “at least sometimes,” despite the majority believing it is a risky behavior.

We often think getting in an accident while texting and driving could never happen to us, but it can and it does. Have you ever sent a text while driving? If so, you put your life in danger, as well as the lives of others. According to a local Indiana news station, an Indiana man killed three people in a crash when he was texting while driving. Chandler Gerber, 23, said he was sending his wife, who was 8 months pregnant at the time, a text that read, “I love you,” when he collided with a family. The fatal crash, as a result of the text, killed a 3-year-old boy, a 5-year-old girl, and a 17-year-old boy who was initially in critical condition, but died several days later. In New Jersey, according to the local news station, Eyewitness News 7, a New Jersey woman was charged with vehicular homicide after authorities alleged she caused a deadly crash while texting and driving that ended the life of a 58-year-old truck driver. These are just some of the tragic traffic crash stories that are read every day by millions of Americans. They are also the stories that have prompted several states, including Florida, to take action against motorists who text while driving.

In Florida, on October 1, 2013, a new law banning texting while driving went into effect. Under the new law, Florida joins 41 other states in prohibiting texting while driving. A motorist can only be charged with violating this law if they are pulled over for a primary traffic violation. Once pulled over for the primary traffic violation, motorists can be ticketed with texting while driving if it is deemed appropriate, which has many proponents saying that the law does not go far enough to prohibit motorists from texting while driving. An Orlando Sentinel news article states that in Florida, over 4,500 crashes in 2012 were attributed to drivers being distracted by their cell phones or other electronic communication devices. Two hundred and fifty-five of those crashes were directly linked to texting, although law enforcement officials say that the actual number of crashes caused by texting is probably much higher.

Whether the new law in Florida will go far enough to prevent traffic crashes from those motorists who text while driving remains to be seen. As we enter the holiday season, motorists must be aware of drunk drivers and distracted drivers who are texting, talking, or taking a mental break behind the wheel.

As an agency or university safety professional, make an extra effort to encourage your employees to not text and drive, especially during the holiday season. Be sure to also encourage your employees to adhere to your organization’s policy on texting while driving. If you don’t have one, the State of Florida Loss Prevention Program (SFLPP) strongly encourages you to implement one.

Texting while driving is dangerous; however, the roadways can be a much safer place this holiday season if everyone remembers to keep safety first by engaging in behaviors which promote safe driving practices for everyone traveling the highways.
“One’s greatest challenge is to control oneself.”
~Kazi Shams

Each year, holiday plans bring more people out onto the roadways to participate in the hustle and bustle of shopping, attending parties, dining out, and attending family gatherings. Long-distance travel is part of the excitement of the holidays for many, but if you plan to hit the road this season to visit loved ones, you should make yourself aware of driver fatigue and take steps to prevent this dangerous condition.

Why do you need to know about driver fatigue? You may not realize that fatigue can impair judgment and decrease reaction time, making sleepy driving just as risky as driving while under the influence of an intoxicant. Driver fatigue is increasingly being cited as a contributing factor in fatal and serious injury vehicle crashes, and is particularly unsafe because a sleepy driver’s ability to judge his or her own tiredness is significantly decreased. While those most likely to be at risk from driver fatigue include shift workers and commercial drivers, fatigue can affect anyone operating a vehicle on the road for an extended period of time.

How can you recognize the warning signs of driver fatigue? Besides obvious signals such as yawning or rubbing your eyes, signs your driving may be impaired due to fatigue can include:

- Difficulty focusing on the road
- Rolling down the car window or turning the radio up
- Drifting out of your lane, off the shoulder, or into the median
- Jerking your vehicle back into the lane
- Trouble keeping your head up
- Tailgating
- Zoning out or daydreaming
- Missing signs or exits
- Inconsistent variations in driving speed; erratic driving
- Micro-sleep/nodding off (seconds-long transitions from wakefulness to sleep)

What can you do to combat driver fatigue on your holiday road trip? There are several strategies you can use to keep yourself from getting fatigued on a long drive; the most important of these is obtaining proper rest. If you know you will be taking a road trip this season:

- Make sure you are well rested before you hit the highway.
- Avoid leaving for a trip after work, as this is normally the time when your body is winding down for the day. If traveling with others, have someone watch you for signs of fatigue and take turns driving so no one person becomes too tired or sleepy.
If sharing the driving is not possible, take regular breaks from the road at least every two hours.
- Time your trip so that you are not on the road for more than 8 to 10 hours at a time, and allow extra time in your schedule in case you need to stop to rest.
- Stay away from fatty snacks that can cause you to get drowsy. Make an effort to consume healthier foods while traveling.
- Try to limit most of the driving to daytime hours when you are less likely to be tired.
- Avoid alcohol, sedative drugs, or other medications that can impair alertness.

What if you are already on the road and you feel yourself becoming fatigued? If you are driving and you experience fatigue:

- Seek a safe place to pull over for a rest break. Do not resume until such time as you have become alert again.
- Keep in mind that turning up the radio, rolling down the window, or drinking coffee only provide short-term benefits in keeping you awake and alert. The only remedy for feeling fatigued is sleep.

Remember, the goal is to arrive safely! Be smart and plan ahead before getting behind the wheel to prevent driver fatigue. Arrive at your destination ready to enjoy holiday festivities with family and friends.

The websites below contain some of the information in this article and additional information pertaining to driver fatigue:


http://www.safeny.ny.gov/drow-ndx.htm


http://optalert.com/driver-fatigue-symptoms-cause-and-effects/

As a way to increase health and safety awareness, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services held their annual safety fair on Wednesday, October 30th. The event was attended by over 400 employees and included a 5K run, over 15 different safety vendors, and presentations for food and wellness professionals.

Below are highlights from the event, which organizers say was an overwhelming success.

“He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.”
~Benjamin Franklin
In this month’s Safety Spotlight profile, the Division of Risk Management, State of Florida Loss Prevention Program is proud to highlight Lieutenant Jimmie Collins with the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. Lt. Collins is a statewide instructor and basic recruit class coordinator at the Florida Highway Patrol Training Academy in Havana. As a Florida Highway Patrol instructor, Lt. Collins is responsible for ensuring that Florida troopers receive and maintain proper training in a variety of topics including driving under the influence; crash investigations; traffic stops; and crime scene and criminal investigations.

Lt. Collins, who has been in his current position for 10 years, stated that the biggest challenge of his job is traffic control. Lt. Collins says that the holidays are a perfect example of how traffic control is very difficult because there are more motorists on the roadways that are traveling to see their families, and there are people on the roads who are visiting from other counties, which can lead to many traffic nightmares.

During this holiday season, Lt. Collins urges motorists not to drive drowsy or engage in drinking or texting while driving. “Our job is to save lives and we take our mission very seriously, which is to promote a safe and secure Florida through professional law enforcement and traffic safety awareness,” said Lt. Collins.

Lt. Collins says that one way motorists can stay safe on the roads during the holidays is for families to plan their trips in advance. This means making sure that your vehicle is ready for the road by checking tire pressure, all of the lights, and vehicle fluids. It also means leaving at times of the day when traffic is less congested such as early morning or late evening. Lt. Collins says Thanksgiving eve and Christmas Eve are the worst days to be on the roads, and if at all possible, he recommends not traveling on those days.

Lt. Collins is an active member of his church, and he is the chair for the Homeless and Haiti Ministries at his church. For more information on holiday traffic safety tips, visit:

In the classic movie, *Wizard of Oz*, you may recall the memorable scene where Dorothy, her dog Toto, and her friends, the Scarecrow, the Cowardly Lion, and the Tin Man are all traveling along the yellow brick road when suddenly they come to a forest. When they get to the forest, Dorothy and her new-found friends are skeptical about leaving the yellow brick road for the harsh terrain of the woods because they know it presents many safety hazards and dangers; including lions, tigers, and bears—oh, my!

The holiday season is here, and just like in the memorable forest scene, there are many safety hazards that state employees should be aware of, especially as we enter this busy and very festive time of the year. The holiday season presents all types of hazards including improper use of candles, turkey fryers, and toys, just to name a few.

As a safety coordinator, it is extremely important to remind employees to take extra care in staying safe this holiday season. This means reminding employees about the following dangers:

**Candles** - According to the U.S. Fire Administration, there are more fires in December and January than at any other time of year. That’s because during the holiday season, many people are decorating their homes with decorative candles, Christmas lights, and roaring fires in the fireplace. Holiday decorations with all the lights, candles, and fires in the fireplace can seem very nostalgic and warming, but if left unattended or improperly monitored, what was meant to be a festive decoration could turn into a deadly disaster.

**Turkey Fryers** - Turkey fryers are another holiday hazard that state employees should take care in using so they remain safe during the holidays. Turkey fryers can be a dangerous liability if they are not handled correctly. Most of the fires related to the use of turkey fryers begin when people add the turkey to the hot oil. The turkey must be completely thawed. Check in the cavity to ensure there is no water and/or ice that can cause the oil to expand and flow out of the pot onto the flame. Also, if too much oil is added to the pot when the turkey is lowered, the oil can overflow and ignite. Another common mistake is dropping the turkey into the oil; it must be slowly lowered to avoid splashing the oil out onto the flames.

The best way to avoid an overflow from too much oil is to:
- Place your turkey in the pot before adding oil.
- Pour water into the pot until it is several inches below the top.
- Take the turkey out and see the level the water is at; this is the amount of oil needed.

**Toys** - We hate to think about it, but even toys can be a source of danger during the holidays. It is important that employees remember to ensure the toys they buy for their children are safe. This means they should inspect the toys and make sure that parts do not come off which could cause a choking hazard.

Lions, tigers, and bears may have been the hazards for Dorothy and her friends in the forest, but candles, turkey fryers, and toys are just a few of the hazards associated with the holiday season. Encourage employees to take extra care in staying safe this holiday so that this festive time is filled with laughter and love, not accidents and injuries.
The second annual Florida Occupational Injury and Illness Coalition Meeting was held on October 2, 2013, in Tampa, Florida. The meeting was hosted by the Florida Department of Health, Occupational Health and Safety Program.

The mission of the coalition is to focus on ways to increase our understanding of the burden of occupational illness and injury in Florida and improve current prevention strategies. The coalition meeting consisted of representatives from government, universities, agriculture, and the private sector.

Meeting Highlights

- Alayne Unterberger, PhD, of Florida International University, presented a pilot project comparing Latino and White construction and warehouse workers.
- Ernie Harben, of Saddle Creek Corporation, filled in for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) representative and discussed the Injury Illness Prevention Program (I2P2) OSHA initiative. The initiative helps employers find and fix workplace hazards before workers are hurt.
- Jeannie Economos, of the Farmworker Association of Florida, led a session on pesticide exposure and farmworker health.
- There was also a panel discussion on important health and safety issues in a university research setting, a private company, and in agriculture.

Moving forward, the coalition would like to explore workers’ compensation costs, young worker issues, and provide additional internship opportunities for students interested in occupational health and safety careers. Together, we can work towards developing best practices which will reduce the burden of illness and injury in the workplace and lower costs.

To learn more about the Florida Occupational Injury and Illness Coalition, contact the Florida Department of Health, Occupational Health and Safety Program at (850) 245-4444 ext. 5117 or go to: http://www.floridahealth.gov/healthy-environments/occupational-health
Safety Snapshot

January 1 through June 30, 2013

Top Five Workers’ Compensation Claim Causes
State of Florida
Report Only

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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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Paid Claims by Cost

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* Data taken from STARS with a development period through 9/30/13.
Driving is the one task nearly every employee performs at some point during the day. In 2012, there were a total of 513 automobile accident claims reported involving state employees, with $3,511,347 paid to date. Today, the majority of accidents are caused by distractions such as eating, reading, talking, and texting on the phone. The reasons are endless, but the one thing we hear the most is, “it was not my fault.” Florida laws—including the “Florida Ban on Texting While Driving” and the “Move Over” law—are designed to help to curtail some of these accidents.

While the “Florida Ban on Texting While Driving” law has only recently been enacted to reduce accidents caused by distracted driving, the “Move Over” law has been in effect for several years and is intended to prevent instances of law enforcement officers becoming struck and seriously injured by motorists while standing outside of their vehicles during routine traffic stops. The “Move Over” law requires motorists traveling on a multi-lane roadway to switch lanes to move away from an emergency vehicle parked at the roadside with lights flashing. This law also requires motorists to yield right-of-way to approaching emergency vehicles en route to meet an existing emergency.

Many accidents also occur in parking lots. Tips to avoid accidents in parking areas include the following:

- When walking to your vehicle, look around you. Are others entering their vehicles in the vicinity of your vehicle?
- Is your vehicle parked between two large vehicles, obstructing your view? If so, back out very slowly until you are able to obtain a clear view or have someone assist you by directing when it is clear for you to back out.
- Use your blinkers, flash your headlights, or bump your brakes; this alerts others of your intentions.
- Tap your horn a few times lightly to signal others.
- Look for reverse lights on vehicles around you to alert you that the other vehicle has intentions of backing.

Below are additional suggestions for avoiding serious automobile accidents.

- When stopped, always leave your foot on the brake. This will keep your brake lights lit and alert others that vehicles are stopped ahead.
- Always use your blinkers, even if there is no one behind you. There is generally someone, somewhere who may need to know your intent.

Continued on next page.
Use the 3-second rule when entering the intersection after being stopped. Count slowly to three, then proceed; this allows anyone running a red light or stop sign enough time to pass through the intersection.

Pay attention to several vehicles ahead of you. If the person two cars in front of you stops suddenly, the person directly in front of you may not be paying attention and might not stop in time. If you pay attention to two or three vehicles in front of you, you have time to react.

In inclement weather, proceed cautiously and slow down.

If tired, take a break, stretch your legs, or get something to eat or drink.

Always check your vehicle’s equipment—such as tires, mirrors, lights, and fluid levels.

Always wear your seatbelt and insist your passengers do the same.

If you have a medical condition which limits your ability to drive for long periods, inform your employer.

Take extra time to get where you need to go, pay attention, and plan your route carefully. If you keep both hands on the wheel, stay alert, and drive defensively, the chances of an accident are greatly reduced.

For copies of the Florida Statutes pertaining to the “Florida Ban on Texting While Driving” and “Move Over” laws, follow the links below:

**Florida Ban on Texting While Driving:**

http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?mode=View%20Statutes&SubMenu=1&App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=text&URL=0300-0399/0316/Sections/0316.305.html

**Move Over:**


Check with your employer regarding the proper procedure for reporting an automobile accident if you are involved in one while performing your job.
Revised Hazard Communication Standard

The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals

The first compliance date of the revised Hazard Communication Standard was December 1, 2013. By that time, employers under the jurisdiction of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) were to have trained their workers on the new label elements and the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) format. While state of Florida employees do not fall under an OSHA-approved state program, workers are already beginning to see the new labels and SDSs on the chemicals in their workplace. Providing training and information on the new label and SDS formats can help protect employees from chemical hazards.

For additional information regarding GHS training, please visit the following OSHA website:


You can review the manual from the United Nations at:

https://www.osha.gov/dsg/hazcom/ghs.html#1.1

You can download the manual in PDF format at:

https://www.osha.gov/dsg/hazcom/ghsguideoct05.pdf
Holiday Depression

Holiday depression is the seemingly unshakable feeling of isolation and sadness when everyone else seems so happy during the holiday season. It often stems from an expectation that the holidays need to be perfect, causing a spiral of guilt, sadness, or anxiety when these expectations are not met. Now that the holiday season has arrived, mental health awareness in the workplace is more important than ever.

Depression causes absenteeism and up to $23 billion in productivity loss annually in American businesses. However, there are numerous approaches to combat holiday depression in the workplace: promoting awareness through employee assistance programs, training supervisors in depression recognition, and ensuring that workers have access to psychiatric services through health insurance benefits.

When managers and fellow employees are able to recognize the signs of depression (tardiness, complaints of fatigue, reduction in work output and work quality, and even safety problems and accidents), they can encourage others to utilize treatment services. Additionally, managers who build an engaged workplace have employees who experience greater workplace job satisfaction, have higher work performance, are more likely to eat healthfully, and suffer from fewer chronic diseases.

Surveys can be used to ascertain information—such as work demands, time pressures, and physical demands—and to assess the level of support provided by supervisors and colleagues. This information can be further utilized to develop training, improve communications, or create better workplace morale.

This upcoming holiday season, create a proactive workplace ready to anticipate the “holiday blues.”

REFERENCES

Florida Senate (n.d.) flsenate.org Senate Bill Increased Speed Limit Referenced 2013 from: http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2014/0392


City of Bloomington (n.d.) bloomington.in.gov


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Bureau of State Employee Workers’ Compensation Claims (850) 413-3123
State Liability Claim Change Form (850) 413-4852
Safety Coordinator Appointment Form (850) 413-4756
Workers’ Compensation Claim Change Form (850) 413-4802

REFERENCES (continued)


Centers for Disease Control (n.d.) cdc.gov Depression: Referenced 2013 from http://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/implementation/topics/depression.html


