

Safety concerns of older drivers demand more attention from employers and workers.

Roadway crashes are the leading cause of occupational fatalities for older workers in the U.S. Between 1992 and 2002, nearly 3,200 workers aged 55 years and older died in motor vehicle crashes on public highways, accounting for 22% of all occupational fatalities among this worker group. Other leading fatal events among older workers were falls (14%), nonhighway motor vehicle crashes (those that occurred or originated entirely off the highway or on industrial or commercial premises) (12%), and homicide (11%).

Source: NIOSH analysis of the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Data exclude New York City.



Fatigue and use of medication may contribute to fatal work-related crashes

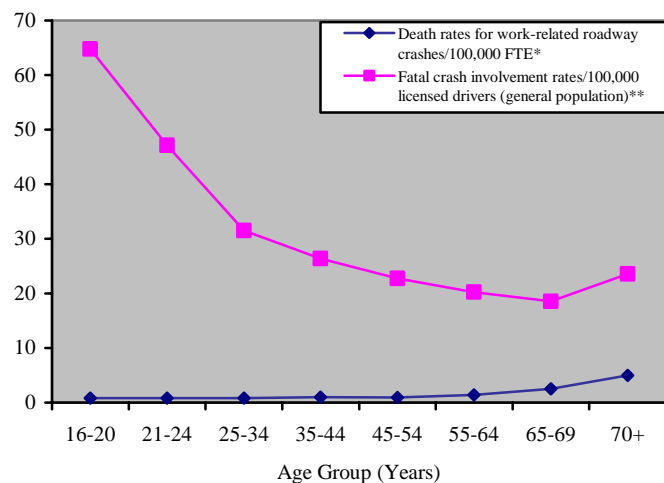
A 61-year-old motor coach driver and six passengers were killed when a bus left the roadway around 4 a.m. and entered an "emergency parking area," striking a parked tractor-trailer and pushing it into a second tractor-trailer. An off-duty police officer reported seeing the bus drift within its travel lane a few minutes before the crash. Investigators concluded that fatigue due to an irregular work-rest schedule and a sedating antihistamine were major contributors to the crash.

Source: National Transportation Safety Board, Highway Accident Report, HAR-00-01

The relationship between age and driving behavior is complex

- In the general population, fatal crash involvement rates decrease with age. Death rates for work-related roadway crashes increase steadily beginning around age 55, and begin to approach rates for the general population (see graph).
- Older drivers are more likely than other drivers to have a crash at an intersection (particularly when turning left), and when merging or changing lanes on a freeway.
- Changes due to normal aging may affect an older person's ability to drive. These may include diminished vision (e.g., reduced night vision and intolerance of glare), slower reaction times, declines in cognitive functioning, and decreasing muscle strength and range of motion. Although most do not affect a person's ability to work, they may affect the ability to safely operate a vehicle. These changes are gradual and highly variable, affecting some drivers much more than others.
- Older workers may also experience a variety of chronic conditions that can affect their ability to drive, including arthritis and macular degeneration.
- Unlike their retired counterparts who can wait for better driving conditions, older workers often have to drive in poor conditions to meet deadlines or delivery dates.

Death Rates for Work-related Roadway Crashes vs. Fatal Crash Involvement Rates for Drivers in the General Population, by Age Group, U.S., 2002



*Rates are reported as full-time equivalent (FTE) and are from a NIOSH analysis of the 2002 Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Data exclude New York City.

**Rates are from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Traffic Safety Facts 2002.

What can employers and workers do to prevent crashes?

Older workers bring a lifetime of skills and experience to their jobs, making valuable contributions into their 70s and beyond. Yet, the normal aging process may affect a worker's ability to drive safely, on or off the job. Although illnesses and other health problems can interfere with driving ability, the effect of many conditions on driving can be reduced or resolved with treatment. The safety of older drivers in the workplace is a shared responsibility of employers and their employees. Forward-thinking safety programs, reasonable accommodations, and open lines of communication between employers and workers can help protect valued older employees from death or disability due to roadway crashes.

Tips for Employers

Policies

- Assign a key member of the management team responsibility and authority to set and enforce comprehensive driver safety policy.
- Enforce mandatory seat belt use.
- Do not require workers to drive irregular hours or far beyond their normal working hours.
- Promote worker health and safety through activities aimed at improving the general health of the workforce (e.g., exercise, diet, and smoking cessation programs).

Assessing Driving Ability

- Assess driving ability through regular physical exams by trained health professionals.
- Restrict driving based on assessment of actual driving ability – not solely on general health status or an arbitrary age limit.
- If a worker's ability to drive is affected temporarily or permanently, make every effort to accommodate that worker to other job duties.

Promoting Safe Driving

- Provide "refresher" driver training and encourage older workers to attend.
- Encourage using familiar routes of delivery.
- Maintain complete and accurate records of workers' driving performance.

Tips for Workers

Prior to Your Trip

- Make sure that you are well-rested.
- Adjust steering wheel, seat, controls, and mirrors.
- Clean lights and windows, and inspect your tires.
- Plan your route, especially if you will be traveling in an unfamiliar area, and allow plenty of time to reach your destination safely.
- Determine if there are construction zones or detours along your route.
- Avoid driving at night and in inclement weather.

During Your Trip

- Use caution at intersections and interchanges, especially when making left hand turns, and avoid cutting between approaching vehicles when doing so.
- Do not use a cell phone while operating a vehicle.
- Stop for regular rest breaks, and do not continue to drive if you are tired.

Health and Mobility

- Maintain good physical health through regular physical activity, proper diet, and regular physical exams by your health care provider.
- Talk with your health care provider or pharmacist about the individual or combined effects of prescription or non-prescription medications on your ability to safely operate a motor vehicle.
- If chronic pain or decreased range of motion is making it difficult to drive, seek advice from a professional with knowledge of driver rehabilitation or adaptive technologies. Simple changes such as extra mirrors or ergonomic seats can make a difference.

For additional information: *

NIOSH—Motor Vehicle topic page:

www.cdc.gov/niosh/injury/traumamv.html

NIOSH Hazard Review: Work-related Roadway Crashes (features additional information on older workers):

www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2003-119/pdfs/2003-119.pdf

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety:

<http://www.seniordrivers.org/home/toppage.cfm>

ADED – Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists:

<http://www.aded.net/j4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>

American Association of Retired Persons:

<http://www.aarp.org/life/drive/>

American Medical Association (features the *Physician's Guide for Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers*):

<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/8925.html>

Federal Highway Administration (features publications on designing roadways to accommodate older drivers):

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/tfhrc/safety/od.htm>

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety:

<http://www.hwysafety.org/safety%5Ffacts/fatality%5Ffacts/older%5Fpeople.htm>

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/older.htm>

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/olddrive/>

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