

Health and Safety Policy Annex G: Safe driving guidance

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Introduction

Although primary emphasis in dealing with road related traffic accidents must be on the prevention of accidents and incidents, West Suffolk Council has in place contingency arrangements for dealing with unplanned events – for example, the immediate consequences of accidents and breakdowns.

Journey planning

Plan the journey and route ahead, including break points. It is important to leave sufficient time for the journey. Take into account prevailing traffic and weather conditions. For further guidance, see 'Journey planner' on page 5.

If planning a long journey, take regular breaks. As a guideline, these should be 15 minutes every two to two and a half hours.

If you feel that you are unable to continue with your journey, no matter how close to the destination, stop and rest.

Vehicle checks

Regular vehicle checks and maintenance will reduce the likelihood of vehicles breaking down during a journey. It is the driver's responsibility to ensure the vehicle is checked and maintained to the relevant standards required by law.

Breakdown

Even well-maintained vehicles sometimes breakdown. All West Suffolk Council lease vehicles have a service contract with a rescue organisation and it strongly recommends that other staff members join a similar rescue service.

In the event of a breakdown:

- if possible and safe to do so, the driver should move the vehicle off the carriageway (onto the hard shoulder of a motorway). Hazard warning lights should be switched on
- any passengers should get out of the vehicle and as far away as possible. The hard shoulder of the motorway is very dangerous. On motorways or busy roads, passengers should be taken onto the embankment or grass margin and kept as far from the traffic as possible. They should be kept in one group. Children must be kept under close supervision. However, there may be circumstances when it may be safer to leave passengers in the vehicle – for example, if it is dangerous to unload passengers in wheelchairs or if there is not a safe waiting area
- the driver should go for help, though vulnerable people and children should not be left alone. The driver will need to give the police or breakdown service accurate details of the vehicle's location and should give any additional details of vulnerable people, those with disabilities, children or lone females. The driver should telephone a nominated contact person and ask them to contact any relatives or family. Most motorways have SOS phones or emergency refuge areas in laybys approximately one and half miles apart.

Preventing falling asleep at the wheel

Driver fatigue is a serious but under-recognised road safety issue. It is considered to play a significant part in up to 25 per cent of vehicle accidents on motorways, longer dual carriageways and other fast roads. Because drivers who fall asleep at the wheel usually fail to take avoiding action or brake, the accident is generally more severe than in other kinds of road traffic accident.

Accidents due to falling asleep at the wheel are more likely to occur at certain times of the day – typically from midnight to 2am, in the early hours of the morning from 4 to 6am and in the mid afternoon from 2 to 4pm.

Factors that may predispose drivers to fall asleep at the wheel include:

- the amount of sleep before driving – the most important factor
- consumption of alcohol or sleep-inducing drugs
- certain types of illness
- boredom, especially on long, featureless roads and where the driver is alone in the vehicle
- age – the tendency to dip in the afternoon increases with age.

As part of ongoing driver awareness, drivers are reminded about:

- the danger of falling asleep at the wheel
- the need for safe journey planning
- the early signs of fatigue and the times of day at which sleepiness is most common

- the strategies which they can employ to cope with its onset should it occur and those strategies which are generally ineffective or effective:
 - Ineffective:
 - opening windows
 - loud music
 - turning down the heater
 - eating sweets
 - singing
 - Effective:
 - planning your journey ahead
 - taking regular breaks
 - taking a short 10-minute nap, in a safe place
 - not setting out on the journey tired.

Where long journeys cannot be undertaken without a significant risk of drivers becoming fatigued, consideration should always be given to using remote communication, such as video conferencing or conference calls. Alternative modes of transport should also be considered.

Remember: Tiredness kills. Don't find sleep. Stop in a safe place and take a break.

Dealing with emergencies

Following an accident or incident (no matter how trivial), it is vital that drivers gather as much data as possible to help West Suffolk Council process accident claims and to learn valuable lessons which may help prevent accidents or incidents in the future.

The following course of action should be followed in the event of an accident:

- make the accident scene as safe as possible
- use hazard warning lights and any other safety devices carried or fitted
- do not move injured passengers unless there is a risk of greater injury or danger from other vehicles or to exposure from harmful substances or fire and explosion
- call the emergency services immediately
- ensure a responsible person remains at the scene of the accident if vulnerable groups are involved.

The minimum amount of information which should be recorded or gathered following an accident should include the following:

- details of damage to driver's and other vehicles and/or property
- any injuries to any party

- names and addresses of any witnesses (including hostile witnesses)
- any other relevant factors, such as personal health, stress, fatigue and so on
- date, time, place
- purpose of journey
- starting time
- environmental conditions (visibility, road surface condition and so on)
- exact location (with reference to a fixed point)
- sketch or, better still, a photograph of the accident scene
- position and direction of travel of vehicles involved in the accident and other parties
- a brief account of what happened using clear language
- registration number, model, make and colour of any other vehicles
- other drivers' or parties' contact details and insurance companies.

Damage only

If the accident is 'damage only' and no one is injured, the driver should ensure that the vehicle is roadworthy before continuing the journey. The incident must be reported to the employer on the driver's return and all necessary data gathered at the scene before proceeding. If names of people involved are not exchanged, it is a legal requirement that the accident is reported within 24 hours to the police.

Reporting and recording of accidents, incidents and near misses

Staff should report all incidents (including near misses) to their line manager at the earliest opportunity. These should be reported on an accident or incident report form as described in Instruction 3 of the Health and Safety Policy.

Investigation should be carried out by the director or line manager, with the help of the Health and Safety Manager where necessary. In accordance with the Reporting of Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR), the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) must be notified within 10 days if the member of staff has been off for more than seven days as a result of a work-related driving incident.

Journey planner

- Do you have to drive?
 - no – use remote communications or go by rail, air, bus or coach – it's safer
 - yes – plan the journey.
- Plan the journey:
 - share the driving if possible
 - ensure your vehicle is in a safe condition
 - make sure you are not impaired by alcohol or drugs
 - make sure you are well rested
 - book an overnight stop if necessary
 - avoid driving in peak sleepiness periods.
- Plan the route:
 - avoid driving when you would normally be asleep
 - plan where to take rest breaks – at least every two hours
 - plan where to stop for the night if necessary
 - check for delays, plan alternative routes.
- During the journey:
 - take rest breaks as planned
 - listen to traffic news for possible delays
 - concentrate on your driving.
- If you start to feel tired:
 - find somewhere safe to stop
 - take two strong caffeine drinks
 - nap for about 15 minutes.
- Too tired to continue? Find somewhere safe to stop overnight.