

Motor Vehicle Safety

Reference: Safety & Environmental Health Manual - COMDTINST M5100.47

The winter season creates additional risks both on and off duty, especially when driving a motor vehicle is involved. It is important that "Team Coast Guard" members take the time to identify, evaluate and control these risks. Failure to do so can result in suffering a major injury, loss of life to you, a shipmate or family member. Due to many of the circumstances surrounding the use of private motor vehicles (PMV), extra precautions should be taken to minimize the probability of a mishap occurring.

Please answer "true" or "false" to each of the following statements assuming they apply to how you operate a motor vehicle, especially your PMV:

1. I always assess risks and plan out my travel before I depart.
2. I always inspect the condition of my vehicle before I depart on a trip.
3. I always use seat belts and other protective equipment when in a motor vehicle.
4. I always make a conscious effort to eliminate distractions while operating a vehicle.
5. I always pull my vehicle over and stop in a safe location before using a cell phone.
6. I never use text messaging while driving (see [Presidential Executive Order 13513](#) or [ALCOAST 012/10](#)).
7. I never drink and drive.
8. I never drive when I am tired or fatigued.

If you answered "false" to any of these statements, you are unnecessarily placing yourself and others at risk, since one or more of these factors contribute to over 90% of vehicle related mishaps.

You can minimize the risks of a PMV mishap occurring by before getting on the road:

A Planning your trip

B Assessing the hazards

C Ensuring you and your vehicle are in good working order

Take the time to plan your trip. Create a written trip plan just as you would for any other mission that includes a map outlining your route, time of departure and expected arrival, passengers traveling with you and any planned stops. Include telephone numbers where you can be reached at your destination, places you plan to visit along the way and your cell phone number. Once the plan is complete, make copies and give it to a friend or supervisor. It will help emergency responders should their assistance be required.

Commanding Officers and Officers-in-Charge (OIC) should emphasize to unit personnel the importance of applying the same risk management principles to driving as they do to their work activities.

Each CG member needs to take responsibility for their personal safety by using appropriate PPE and proactively employing such risk management principles as:

- **Inspect vehicle before departing.** Inclement weather creates hazardous driving conditions, so be sure to inspect vehicle mechanical condition and prepare it for the myriad of conditions you may encounter. Check windshield wipers, tires, brakes and other systems/equipment for proper operation. Make sure an ice scraper, flares, reflectors, jumper cables, cell phone and other emergency equipment is available. If traveling in areas where there may be snow or ice, make sure you have snow chains,

a small shovel and a bag of sand. Carry a blanket, bottled water, flashlight and some non-perishable food items in case you get stranded.

- **Use seat belts or other protective equipment.** One of the simplest ways to protect yourself, your family and friends is to ensure everyone is wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Children should be properly secured in child safety seats that are adequately locked into place. These devices reduce fatal injuries by 71% for infants and 54% for toddlers. CG members are required to wear a seat belt, helmet or other required PPE on and off duty when operating a motor vehicle or motorcycle. Most states also have laws requiring seat belt usage. So comply with CG policy and state laws - always **buckle up**.
- **Don't drink and drive.** It's simple - if you are going to drink, don't drive. If you do drink, drink responsibly and don't serve minors. Plan ahead - leave your keys at home and either ride to the party with a designated driver or take alternative transportation. Make arrangements to take a cab home, be driven by a designated driver or stay over in a hotel. If you choose to use a designated driver, remember that a designated driver is a person who has not been drinking, not the person who has had the least to drink. Drunk-driving claims the lives of more than 14,000 people in the U.S. each year and is the leading cause of death for people under 30. Help others understand the hazards of drinking and driving. You just might save their life.
- **Don't drive when tired or fatigued.** Too often the anticipation of seeing family and friends clouds ones judgment with regard to how long it is safe to drive. Driving at night or departing after work without a resting or a good night sleep can be a recipe for disaster. Statistics show that fatigue is a rising factor in accidents. By following a few common sense tips, you can reduce your risk and arrive safely. Plan ahead - call and make hotel reservations prior to beginning the trip. If traveling with another driver, rotate out of the driver's seat every two hours. If you have a limited amount of time to travel, consider an alternate form of transportation, like a plane, train or bus. Always get adequate sleep or an extended rest period before departing. Fatigue or sleep deprivation can be as deadly as drinking and driving - ensure you are alert and rested.

Another great resource available to Guardians is the Travel Risk Planning System or TRIPS which is an on-line risk planning tool designed to allow members to conduct Private Motor Vehicle (PMV) trip planning. You can access trips through the USCG Shore Safety webpage: <http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cg1/cg113/cg1132/default.asp>. Examples of actual mishaps that occurred during similar trips and other traffic safety information are provided along with helpful safety information covering such topics as fatigue and road rage. Links to weather reports and maps are also available.

Remember to remain vigilant. PMV mishaps don't just occur on the way to and from our destinations - they are more likely to occur after we arrive home and begin the festivities. When we are out with friends and family we must not forget the things that keep us safe such as using seatbelts, securing children in proper safety seats and not driving after drinking. Take five minutes before each activity to be sure proper safety measures are implemented in an effort to reduce or eliminate the possibility of a severe mishap.

For additional information on motor vehicle safety visit COMDT (CG-1132) web site at: <http://www.uscg.mil/safety/cg1132/motorvehiclesafety.asp>.

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