**Five Minutes for Safety**

**Impaired is Impaired**

**Objective:** Lead employees through a conversation that covers the breadth and impact of the numerous actions and substances that contributed to impaired driving. Help employees understand the consequences of driving while impaired.

**Opening:**

Start with a quiz:

Which of these activities can impair your ability to safely operate a motor vehicle? (Ask for a show of hands on each one).

* Drinking alcohol
* Sending a text
* Using marijuana or a THC-infused product
* Eating a messy hamburger
* Scolding your children
* Picking an item up from the car floor
* Tuning the radio

The answer is: ALL OF THEM. Alcohol, marijuana, certain prescription drugs ingested before driving or many other things you might be tempted to do while behind the wheel can have serious potential to negatively affect your reaction time, judgement and other essential driving skills.

Crashes due to some type of impairment are on the rise in Minnesota and across the U.S., as are the numbers of deaths and injuries tied to impaired driving.

Here are some of the facts:

* More than 32,000 crashes were distracted driving-related from 2018-2022, about one in 11 crashes in Minnesota.
* In 2022, distracted driving in Minnesota contributed to  126 serious injuries and 22 deaths.
* Distracted driving contributes to an average of 28 deaths and 156 serious, life-changing injuries a year (2018-2022).
* Of the 488 fatalities on Minnesota roads in 2021, 74 were known to be drunk driving related.
* The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that every year about [100,000 police-reported, drowsy-driving crashes](https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drowsy-driving) result in nearly 800 fatalities and about 50,000 injuries.

That’s a lot of crashes, deaths and injuries due to drivers not being fully physically and mentally engaged behind the wheel.

**Questions for leading the conversation**

Now let’s think about the last few times you were on the road. Odds are you had a moment or two when you wondered if the person in the next vehicle was fully engaged in driving. Or maybe you saw someone whose driving performance was clearly impaired.

Can anyone share an example? (Ask for one or more examples)

Now let’s turn the tables. And unless you’re willing to go public, you can keep the answers to yourself.

* When was the last time you got behind the wheel knowing you were close to or possibly over Minnesota’s legal blood alcohol level? Or after using CBD? Or taking a prescription painkiller?
* Minnesota law limits cellphone use while driving to hands-free only. Have you held your phone to send a text or make a call while driving, telling yourself, “it’s just this once.”
* Have you ever taken your eyes off the road to change your music or pick something off the floor?
* Have you been so tired that you suddenly realized you remembered nothing of the last few miles you’d driven?

I’m sure each of us would admit to doing at least one of these while driving – and maybe recently – doing it while knowing we were putting ourselves, our passengers and others on the road at risk.

**Messages and Facts**  
Here are some things you should know about impaired driving:

**1.**  Alcohol affects four of the abilities we need most while driving:

* Judgment
* Alertness/Attention
* Vision
* Reaction Time

**2.** Alcohol can increase reaction time

* In reality, alcohol does not sneak up and hit us on the head at the legal limit of .08%. All of these effects begin with our first drink. Think about it. One drink makes us a less capable driver than no drinks.
* Minnesotans drink and drive. More than 100,000 Minnesotans self-reported drinking and driving at least once in a 30-day period in 2020.
* 1 in 7 Minnesota drivers has a DWI on record and half of those will re-offend.

**3.** Marijuana affects areas of the brain that control your body’s movements, balance, coordination, memory, and judgment.Marijuana use can impair important skills required for safe driving by:

* Slowing your reaction time and ability to make decisions
* Impairing coordination
* Distorting perception

**4.** Distracted or inattentive driving comes in many forms. Here’s how you can reduce risk and stay safer behind the wheel.

* Cell phones — turn off cell phones, or place them out of reach to avoid the urge to dial or answer. If a passenger is present, ask them to handle calls/texts. When making/receiving a call, ask if the person is driving. If so, ask them to call back at a safer time.
* Music and other controls — pre-program favorite radio stations for easy access and arrange music (mp3 player/CDs/tapes) in an easy-to-access spot. Adjust mirrors and heat/AC before traveling, or ask a passenger to assist.
* Navigation — designate a passenger to serve as a co-pilot to help with directions. If driving alone, map out destinations in advance, and pull over to study a map.
* Eating and drinking — Avoid food/beverages while driving. Pull over where it is safe and legal and take a break to eat.
* Children — teach children the importance of good behavior in a vehicle; do not underestimate how distracting it can be to tend to children while driving.
* Passengers — speak up to stop drivers from distracted driving behavior.

**Review company/organization policies on use of alcohol, drugs or related substances, prescription drugs with impairment risk and hands-free cell phone use, if applicable.**

**Closing reinforcement**

The facts are clear. Driving requires your full attention. I leave you with one very clear piece of advice. Hands on the wheel. Eyes on the road. Mind on driving.

**Sources:** Minnesota Department of Public Safety,

Office of Traffic Safety

Minnesota Department of Public Health

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Centers for Disease Control