



Driving for Work

Driving for work is the most dangerous activity most employees ever undertake.

Employees who drive on business are more likely to be killed at work than those employed as deep sea divers or coal miners.⁽¹⁾

Why? There are hundreds of thousands of injuries on the roads every year and literally millions of collisions that result in expensive damage to vehicles and property. Around a third of these are thought to involve drivers who were at work, and almost all are avoidable.

In the hazardous industry of asbestos abatement, the risks from driving are often insufficiently addressed, perhaps because most of the focus is on controlling site risks and not the risks of getting to site and going home again.

However, organisations have a legal duty to put in place suitable arrangements to manage health and safety. This is a wide-ranging requirement and includes driving for work, for which the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) encourages a common-sense and practical approach⁽²⁾. It should be part of the everyday process of running an organisation and part of good management generally.

As with other health and safety issues, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (particularly sections 2,3, 7 and 8) apply to driving for work, together with

the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 (particularly reg. 3 on risk assessment). Many organisations provide further useful guidance, such as the HSE (publication INDG382, Driving at Work)⁽²⁾, and Driving for Better Business (a government-backed Highways England programme).

There is also a strong business case for managing work-related road safety. Fewer road incidents mean:

- ▶ fewer days lost to injury
- ▶ fewer repairs to vehicles
- ▶ fewer missed orders
- ▶ reduced running costs

While there is no legal requirement to have a specific Driving Policy, many organisations do have one, in order to make clear to company drivers, and others, the seriousness with which it considers driving risk, its commitment, what the organisation expects from its drivers, the resources to be made available, and the role drivers themselves have in reducing workplace driving risk.

Health and safety law does not apply to people commuting (i.e. travelling between their home and their usual place of work), unless they are travelling from their home to somewhere which is not their usual place of work. However, the laws of the road will always need to be followed, and the principles of safer driving should be embraced by commuters regardless of whether health and safety law applies or not.

The HSE has set out a 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' approach⁽³⁾ to help organisations put suitable arrangements in place to address driver risk.

Plan – Describe how you manage health and safety in your organisation and plan to make it happen in practice

- ▶ Assess the risks from work-related road safety in your organisation.
- ▶ Produce a health and safety policy covering, for example, organising journeys, driver training and vehicle maintenance.
- ▶ Make sure there is top-level commitment to work-related road safety in your organisation.
- ▶ Clearly set out everyone's roles and responsibilities for work-related road safety. Those responsible should have enough authority to exert influence and be able to communicate effectively to drivers and others.

Do – Prioritise and control your risks, consult your employees and provide training and information

- ▶ In larger organisations, make sure departments with different responsibilities for work-related road safety co-operate with each other.
- ▶ Make sure you have adequate systems to allow you to manage work-related road safety effectively. For example, do you ensure your vehicles are regularly inspected and serviced according to manufacturers' recommendations?

- ▶ Make sure you involve your workers or their representatives in decisions. This is a good way of communicating with them about health and safety issues.
- ▶ You must provide training and instruction where necessary.

Check – Measure how you are doing

- ▶ Monitor performance to ensure your work-related road safety policy is effective and has been implemented.
- ▶ Encourage your employees to report all work-related road incidents or near misses.

Act – Review your performance and learn from your experience

- ▶ Make sure you collect enough information to allow you to make informed decisions about the effectiveness of your existing policy and the need for changes, for example targeting those more exposed to risk.
- ▶ Regularly revisit your policy to see if it needs updating.

Driving Risk Assessments

Risk assessments for driving can be formulated using the same format as standard risk assessments, which leads to assessing who might be harmed and how, and what control measures are already in place to reduce the risk. As with all risk assessments, the crucial part is deciding what (if any) further controls will be required to reduce the risks to a level that is acceptable and/or as low as reasonably practicable. In other words, you will need to assess and manage the risks.

As with all risk assessments, you will need to make sure it is carried out by someone who:

- ▶ is competent to do so (has the right skills, knowledge and experience)
- ▶ involves your workers in the process
- ▶ understands when specialist help may be needed

When assessing the risks from driving for work, a common-sense approach is to focus on ensuring:

- ▶ Safe drivers
- ▶ Safe vehicles, and
- ▶ Safe workplaces / traffic routes (which will include all work-related journeys)

Safe Drivers

Are your drivers competent and capable of doing their work in a way that is safe for them and other people? This would include determining what levels of skill and expertise are required to do the job safely and how you ensure these are met.

Do you arrange for drivers to be trained – giving priority to those at highest risk, e.g. those with high annual mileage, poor accident records, or those new to the job?

Do you ensure the appropriate training for drivers who are required to tow (e.g. decontamination units), or transport waste, and are the training providers you select competent to deliver the training you require?

Do you ensure your drivers have clear instructions about how to keep themselves safe while on the road, and what do you do to ensure these instructions are followed? This would include routine vehicle checks, driver seat adjustment, what to do in the event of a breakdown, your alcohol and drugs policy and your mobile phone policy.

Are your drivers sufficiently fit and healthy to drive safely and not put themselves or others at risk? This would include reporting any health issues or use of medications that may affect driving, as well as advice on managing tiredness by taking sufficient breaks on longer journeys.

Safe Vehicles

Are your vehicles fit for the purpose for which they are used, and maintained in a safe and fit condition? This includes the selection of the vehicle to be suitable for the intended purpose and the ongoing maintenance in accordance with the manufacturers' recommendations. This would also include a procedure for reporting defects so they can be remedied promptly, and that unsafe vehicles should not be driven.

Safe Workplaces / Traffic Routes

Do you plan routes in consultation with drivers, taking account of, for example, the need for rest breaks and access to toilets and washing facilities?

Are work schedules realistic? Some projects may demand driving 7 days per week, often with long journeys in peak traffic either side of the working day. Effective planning and consultation with workers may result in coming up with solutions that alter schedules or rotate drivers. Journey times will need to take account of road types and conditions, and allow for rest breaks. The Highway Code recommends that drivers should take a 15-minute break every two hours.

Do you consider poor weather conditions, such as snow or high winds, when planning journeys, and would your drivers feel pressured to complete journeys where weather conditions are exceptionally difficult?

Other considerations may need to be taken into account that are specific to particular circumstances. Amidst COVID restrictions, and the lifting of such restrictions, there will be drivers returning to the roads who haven't driven much recently, and those who have driven during the restrictions will be experiencing much more traffic than they have become accustomed to. These factors alone may lead to increased risks. Also, some vehicles may not have been driven much, and therefore potentially not been maintained for a good while, which may also increase risk.

Remember that to get your workers to and from sites safely is an equal priority and legal obligation as it is to keep them safe whilst at their workplace. It makes good business sense too, as well as being morally correct.

Managed well, and in consultation with your drivers, your actions may well reduce the stresses of driving for work and therefore improve overall mental health and wellbeing of your employees too.

(1) *Driving for Better Safety, Safety and Health Practitioner, 2021*

(2), (3) *Driving at Work, INDG382, Health and Safety Executive, 2014 (under review)*