



Working together to eliminate road death and serious injuries

## Bringing you important news for business drivers: December 08



### Seasons Greetings

All of us at DriveTech wish you a very happy and peaceful Christmas and look forward to working with you again during 2009!

### Beware sleeping pills

Even the occasional use of sleeping pills increases the chances of a crash, say researchers at the Norwegian Institute of Public Health.

They found that the risks are not just confined to older drugs, called benzodiazepines,



long known to cause daytime drowsiness. So-called z-hypnotics, a newer class of 'safer' drugs that have emerged over the last ten years, also significantly increased collision rates in people who drove the day after taking them.

Around half-a-million million prescriptions a year in the UK are issued for z-hypnotics such as zolpidem, sold in the UK under the brand name Stilnoct.

In the latest alert, published in the journal *Sleep Medicine*, researchers studied car incident rates in the week after patients were prescribed sleeping tablets and compared them with the period when they were not on the drugs. The results showed incidents more than doubled while on the zolpidem and rose four-fold among those on flunitrazepam.

In a report on their findings, the researchers said: 'Young drivers had the highest accident risk and males a greater risk than females.' The DVLA said it did not issue

specific advice on driving while taking prescription medicines.

Professor Jim Horne, an expert in sleep medicine at Loughborough University, said the findings contrasted with many other studies suggesting drugs like zolpidem were perfectly safe.

Those responsible for fleet drivers of any kind would be well advised to make their drivers sign some form of health declaration, as it is virtually impossible to police abuse of such substances, and employers need to be seen to be taking reasonable steps to absolve themselves of responsibility.

### **Distraction factor**

We are often asked why chatting to passengers in the car is not as distracting as talking to someone on a hands free mobile phone whilst driving but now we have some scientific proof that this is definitely the case.

Researchers at Utah University have proved that drivers were more likely to drift out of their lane and miss a right turning if they were using a hands-free set, than if they were talking to someone sat in the car or not speaking at all.

The risk of having a collision was greater if the driver was alone, the study found. "If the



passenger is in the vehicle and knows what the traffic conditions are like, they help the driver by reminding them of where to take an exit and pointing out hazards," researcher David Strayer said.

The findings were significant enough for the researchers to issue a statement urging people not to call drivers who would need to use a hands-free set to talk to them.

### **Grey fleet blues**

According to the Grey Fleet Best Practice Guide published by the Office of Government Commerce, public sector bodies are wasting millions of pounds a year and exposing themselves to unnecessary road risk.



Apparently public sector employees travel 1.4 billion miles a year,

mainly in cars over six years old which have emissions 27% higher than a new vehicles. Research confirmed that a grey fleet driver making the 240 mile round trip between London and Bristol would cost his employer £96, compared to £49 by public transport, £60 for a hire car and £76 in a lease car.

Clearly whatever applies to public sector grey fleets applies to private sector ones as well.

## Bad breath

It's the time of year when driver behaviour is firmly focused on not drinking and driving. Some drivers are resorting to a self test by using proprietary breath testers, often bought off the internet.



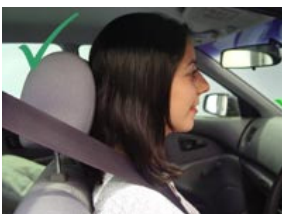
By checking if they are fit to drive after drinking in this way they may be leaving themselves open to prosecution, after tests showed that the units are unreliable and often give false readings.

Every device tested gave a different alcohol reading to the official police unit, while more than half of the devices showed that it was safe for the person to drive, despite being over the legal drink-drive limit of 35 micrograms of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath.

## Neck ache

Whiplash personal injury claims are placing increasing pressure on motor insurance premiums, according to AA Insurance. The AA has contributed to a report by the Association of British Insurers which shows that 1,200 people claim for whiplash injury **every day** following a motor collision, an increase of 25 per cent over the past five years.

The report says that 430,000 people claimed for whiplash injury in 2007, costing the insurance industry £1.9bn in compensation.



“The cost of whiplash claims equates to about £66 for every UK car insurance policy,” says Simon Douglas of AA Insurance, “or about 14 per cent of the average shoparound car insurance premium. This is more than twice the cost of claims for accidents

with uninsured drivers.”

In a recent test by Euro NCAP only five out of twenty five new models tested provided adequate anti-whiplash protection. However in most cases it is the ignorance of the driver that is the main contributory cause of neck injury in crashes, as few people adjust the head restraint correctly – the middle of the restraint should be level with line of the ears to be effective.

### No 5 star rating without ESC



Under the new Euro NCAP scoring system, vehicles will need to do well in each area of assessment to achieve a good overall result. In particular, it will be impossible for a carmaker to achieve five stars in the tested vehicle without the standard fitment of electronic stability control (ESC) in the majority of variants sold. Statistics reveal that ESC plays such a major role in reducing deaths on our roads that Euro NCAP believes no car should be able to achieve five stars without it.

First results for vehicles tested under the new rating system will be released in February 2009. From this date, consumers should look out for the new overall Euro NCAP star rating for their vehicle. This shows the car has been subject to a tougher assessment in the achievement of its final award.

### ...and news from DriveTech itself:

#### Winning ways

DriveTech is definitely on a roll! Following the company's 'Best Driver Training Company' title in the 2008 Green Fleet Awards, it has now been voted '**Thames Valley Business of the Year 2008**'. And, as if it couldn't get any better, our chairman, Chris Howell, was recently voted '**South East Director of the Year**' (for companies with a turnover between £5 and £20 million) by the Institute of Directors.

#### Help is at hand

With penalties for speeding, drink-driving, drug-driving, careless driving and non wearing of seat belts about to be made more severe as the final stages of the 2006 Road Safety Act are finally implemented, there has never been a better time to ensure that your

drivers are in possession of everything they need to know about driving safely and responsibly.

An excellent source of reference is the new driver safety handbook template created by DriveTech FleetSafe, which the individual client can tailor to their own needs. Written in Microsoft Word, the handbook saves companies many hours of effort and provides a document that supports duty of care requirements. This handbook can be purchased for £175 including updates and enquiries should be directed to FleetSafe Account Development Manager, Kelly Robertson, on 01344 467886 or via email at [fleetsafe@drivetech.co.uk](mailto:fleetsafe@drivetech.co.uk)

### **New licence checking service**

DriveTech is now one of only a handful of suppliers who can provide customers with the latest driver licence checking service from the DVLA, where data is exchanged using an electronic secure file transfer system. This is a much faster, less onerous and even more secure method of licence checking than before and allows checks to be made on a daily basis if required, providing a mandate has been signed by the driver.

For further information about this state-of-the-art service please contact Kelly Robertson, on 01344 467886 or via email at [fleetsafe@drivetech.co.uk](mailto:fleetsafe@drivetech.co.uk)

Incidentally certain fleet service suppliers are claiming that they can provide an *online* driver licence checking service. THIS IS NOT TRUE, unless they are part of the DVLA pilot scheme, so one should be wary of such claims in the media.

### **Christmas Opening Hours**

DriveTech is operating the following hours of business over the Christmas period:

December 24 <sup>th</sup>	08.00-13.00
December 25 <sup>th</sup> & 26 <sup>th</sup>	Closed
December 29 <sup>th</sup> to 31 <sup>st</sup>	09.00-16.00
January 1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Closed
January 5 <sup>th</sup>	Normal business hours

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