



May 19, 2020

Back to Office (BTO) Driving and Vehicle Safety Readiness

The Governors Highway Association (GHSA) has reported that many states are seeing alarming speed increases, with some vehicles traveling at 100 MPH or more.¹ Once employees begin to go back to the office or workplace on a more regular basis, they may likely encounter many drivers who have been accustomed to operating on highways that were not heavily traveled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers should consider taking this opportunity to have employees complete a safe driver training program. The training will better prepare them for the increased number of aggressive and inattentive drivers who have taken advantage of the roadway conditions that have occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Employees returning to the office may find that many of their employer's fleet vehicles, and perhaps their personal vehicles, have not been operated for a while. It is recommended that employers prepare the fleet, by conducting inspections to ensure that the vehicles can be safely operated by employees who are returning for work. It is also recommended that employers remind their personnel of the importance of pre-trip vehicle inspections whenever they operate any vehicle.

Back to Office Driving Safety

Employees may complete any one or more of the below training courses on traffic safety so they can be better prepared to handle any increased traffic safety threats when they return to work.

MEL Safety Institute - MSI NOW: <https://njmel.org/mel-safety-institute/overview-2/>

- Survival Driving – Urban Driving (Approximately 30 Minutes)
- Distracted Driving (Approximate 17 Minutes)
- Vehicle Inspection
- On the Road Safety
- Space Management around Your Truck

Safety Emergency Responder Vehicle Education - S:ERVE: <https://train.onqsafety.com/meljif>

- Safety National Attention and Distraction (Approximately 30 Minutes)

Employers should also ensure that employees licenses are compliant with the current law. Although the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission has granted some extensions for drivers' license renewals, employers must ensure employees do not become distracted and forget to renew their licenses as required.

Employers should regularly check the Motor Vehicle Commission website for the latest information. A recent MVC bulletin regarding license renewals can be viewed here:

<https://www.state.nj.us/mvc/pdf/about/FREQUENTLY%20ASKED%20QUESTIONS.pdf>

See the below MSI Bulletins for additional guidance regarding drivers license checks:

- CDL Drivers: <https://njmel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MSI-Bulletin-CDL-MVR-Program-Checks-Jan-2020.pdf>

This bulletin is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization's policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this bulletin, contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046.

- Non-CDL Drivers: <https://njmel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MSI-Bulletin-MVR-Checks-Reminder-Jan-2020.pdf>

Back to Office Vehicle Readiness

It is essential to maintain a vehicle that has been parked or unused during the pandemic. Fleet managers and employee administrators should ensure that:

1. Regularly scheduled maintenance, vehicle manufacture preventative maintenance, and general service have been completed before employees utilize fleet vehicles.
2. Vehicles that have been parked have undergone a comprehensive pre-trip safety inspection and service to include at a minimum:
 - Inspecting tire condition/pressure (including the spare tire)
 - Checking the oil and all fluid levels
 - A test drive by a qualified mechanic
 - Ensuring the wiper blades are in good working condition
 - Ensuring the battery condition is appropriate
 - A visual inspection of all bulbs and lamps
 - The exterior of the vehicle is adequately clean as not to diminish headlight and lamp intensity or windshield/vehicle glass view obstructions
 - An overall visual inspection of the vehicle to include a check for rodent infestation or insect nests.
3. A plan is in place to clean potentially contaminated vehicles. It may difficult to fully know if a person infected with COVID-19 was in a fleet vehicle, so it is important to have a plan in place to clean the interior of vehicles that could be potentially contaminated. See the below links for guidance:
General Cleaning: <https://njmel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Cleaning-Surfaces-COVID-19-MSI-Briefing-Mar-2020.pdf>
Vehicle Cleaning: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/disinfecting-transport-vehicles.html>
4. A review of any possible manufacturer recalls.

Fleet Managers and Administrators should develop a plan for when employees return to the office and operate fleet vehicles that may include:

- Developing a cleaning guide and frequency for vehicles (e.g. twice per day, after each use, or other)
- Establishing a protocol for proper disposal of face masks, gloves, and other PPE that may have been utilized while operating a fleet vehicle
- Determine if drivers must wear a face mask while operating a fleet vehicle even when alone (to help protect others who may share the vehicle)
- Determine if there will be any restrictions to the number of occupants in a vehicle
- Determine if fleet vehicles should be stocked with protective masks and other PPE
- Determine if there are any travel restrictions in place while utilizing a fleet vehicle

Employers should remind employees that as drivers, they should always conduct a routine pre-trip vehicle visual inspection of any vehicle that they drive. Such pre-trip inspections should include at a minimum:

- Looking for any view obstructions – dirty glass, debris.
- Visually inspect tires for hazards, excessive wear, and proper inflation.
- Ensuring that bulbs and lamps are in proper working order.
- Visually inspect all mirrors to ensure they are in good condition.
- Upon initially driving the vehicle, paying close attention to any unusual noises or vibrations.

Employees should be reminded of any specific policies on how to report a vehicle problem and how to place a vehicle out of service.

Our goal is to help keep your employees safe and to mitigate the risks that confront them while returning to work. By implementing these practices and providing reliable policy guidance, we can mitigate many of the risks that drivers may be confronted with as they begin traveling back to work and resume their normal work activities.

Resources

Automotive Fleet.com: <https://www.automotive-fleet.com/354390/advice-for-fleets-during-the-pandemic>

Consumer Reports: <https://www.consumerreports.org/car-maintenance/car-care-and-maintenance-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19/>

National Safety Council:

https://www.nsc.org/Portals/0/Documents/NSCDocuments_Advocacy/Safety%20at%20Work/covid-19/SAFER%20Framework%20Summary050620.pdf?ver=2020-05-06-162456-463

¹Governors Highway Safety Association. (2020, April 16). *Absent Traffic Jams, Many Drivers Getting More Reckless*. Retrieved May 11, 2020, from Governors Highway Safety Association: <https://www.ghsa.org/resources/news-releases/coronavirus-reckless-driving20>