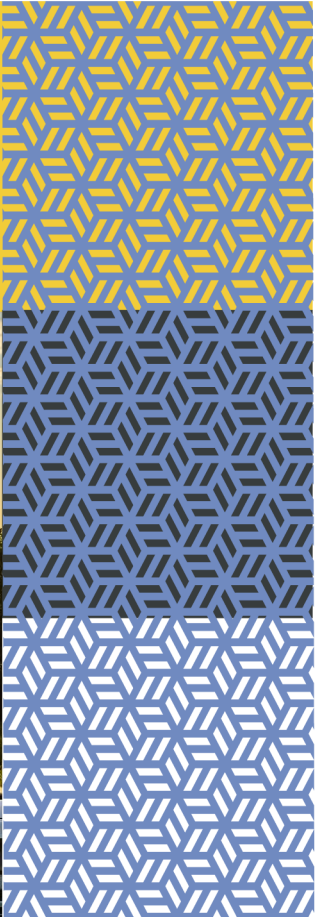


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Risk control
Summer Driving



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Summer Driving

Introduction

Many organisations advise their drivers on the risks of winter driving but less emphasis is put on the risks of the summer. As we head into warmer months, it is important for drivers to recognise the new risks that also emerge, and how to manage those effectively.

Dehydration

The temperature inside a vehicle can be double the outside temperature within 15 minutes so it is important to stay comfortable when travelling. This could include using features such as the air conditioning, opening a window if traveling in built up areas and staying hydrated. The dangers of being dehydrated include a loss of attention or awareness, feeling lightheaded, drifting across lanes, cramps and slower reaction times, which will all have a negative impact on road safety. Research suggests that when someone is dehydrated they make twice as many errors as someone who is not ¹.

It is recommended drivers stop and drink at least 2 litres of water a day and ensure that is spread out regularly throughout the day.

Fatigue

Heat can also bring on feelings of fatigue more quickly causing impaired concentration and an increase in driving errors. It is vital to ensure drivers remain comfortable and hydrated when driving and planning is a key element. Take regular breaks, use the climate control functions, staying hydrated (but not energy drinks) and recognise the signs of drowsy driving. Knowing the indicators will help ensure drivers act upon them.

Weather

Whilst driving in the summer appears safer, living in the UK means that we are prone to the odd summer downpour. After a spell of dry weather, if the rain arrives it can immediately make the roads very slippery particularly on bends and at junctions. This is because when braking vehicles leave small deposits of brake dust and even oil on the road, which become greasy. The bitumen in the road itself can also 'leak' to the surface. Drivers should be aware of the risks, ensure tyres well maintained, correctly inflated and consider reducing speed in these locations ².

Hay Fever

Many drivers suffer from hay fever, causing symptoms such as runny nose, continual or uncontrollable sneezing known as autonomy and itchy eyes. This can be distracting and cause issues focusing on the driving task with vision becoming poor or blurred. Most modern vehicles will have dust and pollen filters fitted helping to prevent the small particles entering the vehicle cabin, providing the windows are closed, and when using the air conditioning or air flow systems. It is important to vacuum the vehicle every couple of weeks and replace the pollen filter at approximately 12,000 miles as it can become blocked.

Drivers should consider the time of day they travel if possible, be aware of the weather forecast for the day and take non-drowsy medication to help manage the symptoms. Always read the label and only take the recommended dose as it is possible to fail a drug driving test due to the active ingredients, along with driving whilst tired which would be a separate offence. This could include not being in full control of your vehicle. The bright sun itself can cause eyes to water so having a pair of sunglasses to hand could help whether they are prescription or a simple pair. A small amount of Vaseline, or lipsalve, near our nose can help trap pollen when the pollen count is high. If the symptoms are causing an issue during the drive consider maintaining a safe distance between yourself and other vehicles whilst finding somewhere safe to stop ³.

Insects

The number of insects covering the number plate across the UK is estimated to have decreased by 77.6% between 2004 and 2023 ⁴, but could still be a distraction if they fly into the vehicle. Many people are scared of insects, from fears to phobias through to allergic reactions such as those caused by wasps or spiders with road fatalities having being caused as result. A driver becomes distracted, swerves or brakes harshly and may sadly lose control.

For a driver who finds themselves in that situation the advice is to slow down and focus on the road ahead until they can stop safely. Open the doors and all the windows to allow the insect to escape. Make more use of air conditioning or climate control to avoid the insect entering in the first instance. Avoid trying to swipe it away as it could become more aggressive and it keeps the drivers hands firmly on the wheel.

Road Rage

Warm weather can disrupt sleep patterns as well as making drivers more tired in the daytime. This could make them less tolerant to others and lead to road rage incidents from minor displays of annoyance through to full aggression. Drivers should be encouraged to stay calm, let the incident pass and take deep breaths. They should also be encouraged to consider the organisational reputation for which they are representing.

Vehicle preparation

Driving in sunny conditions can cause glare and cause difficulty in seeing clearly ahead. This could be from the sun reflecting off other vehicles, the wet road and even making drivers squint if more light sensitive. Not only would sunglasses help polarise this light but also ensuring window and mirror glass is clean both inside and out before travelling. Good vehicle preparation is key through ensuring the windscreen washer is full, headlights are clean so other drivers can see you with daytime running lights (DRL) now mandatory fittings, along with tyre pressures, oil and radiator levels correct.

Vehicle contents

With temperatures in vehicles potentially soaring in hot weather drivers should consider what items they leave inside the cabin area, due to the risk of overheating and possible vehicle fires. This can include electrical items such as mobile phones and satellite navigation systems where the battery can become too hot. Whilst taking drinks such as bottled water is encouraged, chemicals in the bottle can be released into the water and are potentially damaging to health. Sun cream contains active ingredients that can break down in hot weather making it less effective with the risk of the bottle exploding. The risk of explosion or fire can also apply to cans of drink, aerosols and even hand sanitiser. Drivers should consider where these items are kept in the vehicle but ensuring they are kept out of full sun⁵.

Skin Health

Those who work outside or drive for work may be at greater risk of skin cancer as exposure over a long period of time can increase the risks. UV rays are able to penetrate through glass causing skin damage and even premature aging with those who like to drive with the window down also at risk. Drivers should be encouraged to recognise the risks and encouraged to use sun cream or wear long sleeves to protect themselves.

Highway Code

Many of the points covered are detailed in the Highway Code which provides both legislation and guidance. However due to the quasi legal status of the code drivers can still be prosecuted for ignoring the advice. Rule 237 states that 'Keep your vehicle well ventilated to avoid drowsiness. Be aware that the road surface may become soft or if it rains after a dry spell may become slippery. These conditions could affect your steering and braking. If dazzled by bright sunlight, slow down and if necessary, stop.

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