

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Water and Sewer District Driver Safety Guide

Water and sewer district maintenance, service, and administrative staff are involved with a significant number of vehicle accidents every year. Sometimes the accident is a result of vehicle equipment failure, unawareness of unsafe conditions, or the driver was just in a hurry. Costs of these accidents are often high and can result in personal injury.

As professionals, safe driving means doing everything possible to make sure our vehicles, as well as we as drivers, will respond well in an emergency.

The most common district vehicles are pickup trucks. They can be light, medium, or heavy pickup units. These vehicles are driven in metropolitan, urban, and remote areas, and weather and road conditions vary significantly. However, driving safely applies to all district vehicles.

There are common conditions that apply to all water and sewer district vehicle fleets. To address some of these issues, this vehicle safety outline will discuss the following driver safety topics:

- I. Pre-trip Vehicle Inspection*
- II. Pre-trip Driver Inspection*
- III. Safe Driving*
- IV. Safe Backing-up of the Vehicle*

I. Pre-Trip Vehicle Inspection

A vehicle equipment failure from brakes, tires, or other related problems can lead to a serious accident. Therefore, every effort should be made to ensure the vehicle is in proper working order prior to going out on the road by performing a review.

This review function begins as the driver approaches the vehicle. The driver should look for oil or fuel leaks; check tires (treading, air pressure, and lug nuts); and examine the vehicle for broken windshields, windows, brake and other lights; or anything that is visibly wrong.

Once inside the vehicle, the driver should check all driving systems. For example, the driver should verify that the mirrors, steering wheel, brakes, gauges, and other operational components are in proper working order. Also, the driver should be aware of any previous problems regarding the vehicle and make sure any maintenance problems were satisfactorily resolved.

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RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Before leaving, the driver should inspect the rear truck bed of the vehicle to make sure all portable equipment and supplies are properly secured.

If a vehicle is deficient in any way, the driver should address the problem immediately. Here are some driver guidelines:

- Do not go out on the road with a major operational problem.
- Report any problem to the vehicle maintenance department.
- Record all deficiencies and maintain a record in your files.

II. Pre-Trip Driver Inspection

The condition of the driver is just as important as the condition of the vehicle. Therefore, a pre-trip evaluation of the operational status of the driver is critical.

It is very unusual for a district to have drivers under the influence of drugs or alcohol. However, this point should always be a management consideration. Also, if a driver is using prescription medication, there should be an evaluation on the impact the drug may have on the driver.

Driver alertness is a key component to safe driving. A driver on the job for seven hours may not be as alert as someone just coming on duty. Are long hours creating a fatigue exposure? Did the employee get enough sleep? These considerations should be evaluated by management.

An employee rushing to a destination can cause accidents. Going too fast on levee or canal roads can lead to loss of control of the vehicle and disastrous results. Management should make it clear to all drivers that unsafe or rapid driving to a destination will not be tolerated.

Management should be open to honest communications from employees regarding prescription medication, fatigue, effects of long hours, lack of sleep, and other debilitating driver conditions. Management should encourage employees to communicate freely on these issues and develop appropriate methods to safely deal with these situations.

III. Safe Driving

While driving, maintaining constant awareness of conditions around the district vehicle is very important. The key points addressed are visual, vehicle communication, and vehicle safety cushion considerations.

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RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Visual

This point begins with visual recognition by the driver of other vehicles, pedestrians, and road hazards in and around the truck. All potential hazards should be identified quickly and avoidance measures taken prior to a problem developing. Some important considerations are:

- Review all mirrors every few seconds
- Look for fast approaching vehicles
- Identify erratic drivers
- Be cautious when approaching large vehicle hazards
- Identify upcoming road hazards
- Keep track of intersection light changes
- Scan up close and far down the road to assess long-range and nearby road conditions and situations

Vehicle Communication

The vehicle itself also communicates with the other vehicles around it. By allowing other drivers to properly interpret your intentions, a safer driving situation should develop. The vehicle has signal lights, brake lights, and other features that contribute to safer driving. Following are some helpful tips:

- Drive in the proper lane (don't travel in the fast lane or inappropriate turn lanes)
- Get into the proper turning lane early to avoid a rush situation
- Use turn signals appropriately and well in advance
- Use vehicle horn appropriately but not excessively
- Brake in a timely manner; avoid sudden stops
- Keep headlights on if there is any precipitation
- Anticipate mistakes by other drivers (recognize communications of other vehicles)

Vehicle Safety Cushion

A solid clear space around your vehicle allows for additional time and area to maneuver in an emergency situation. This will allow other drivers better reaction time also. A few considerations are:

- Be aware of other vehicles around you; maintain a clear space if possible
- Adjust speed to maintain safe distances
- Avoid driving in other vehicles' blind spots
- Maintain adequate following distances
- Leave a space in front of your vehicle while stopping in traffic
- Slow down in bad weather conditions

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RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

- Drive and park extra safe at work and job sites (avoid tight spaces and areas near workplaces, construction sites, and heavy equipment)

Other Considerations

While driving, the weather and road conditions should always be analyzed. Rain or snow will affect driving conditions differently on dirt as opposed to asphalt. Braking and vehicle control will also be affected.

Use seat belts properly.

Districts often use radios or cell phones for dispatch communications. This creates a significant distraction if done while driving. The driver should pull over and park if possible while using these communication systems.

IV. Safe Backing-up of the Vehicle

Many district accidents occur while backing up. Typically, vehicles have backed into fences, posts, other vehicles, pedestrians, tanks, or other equipment. Most of these situations could have been avoided. Some steps to prevent backing-up accidents are as follows:

- Identify blind spots
- Use a helper, if possible, to assist in safely guiding the vehicle backwards (use hand signals and verbal communication)
- Drive backwards slowly
- Check the rear area of the vehicle yourself
- Turn off distractions (radio, cell phones, etc.)
- Don't rely on backup alarms (if equipped)
- Be especially on the lookout for pedestrians
- Roll down your window so you can hear better
- If desired, after parking, place a cone at the rear of the vehicle, requiring the driver to go to the rear and remove it prior to driving again (re-acquainting the driver with the rear area conditions)
- If in doubt of the rear area, stop and review all areas

V. Review

We have covered a significant amount of information designed to improve district driving safety. Vehicle operations and types of vehicles vary from district to district. However the focus on safety should remain high in all cases.

Management needs to review the accident history of their vehicles and drivers and identify which safety measures most need to be addressed.

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RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

To review the issues discussed in this guide, we covered:

- Pre-trip Vehicle Inspection, where the driver reviews the safe condition of the vehicle prior to going on the road.
- Pre-trip Driver Inspection, where the driver reviews the safe operating condition of himself as a driver (or management evaluates this).
- Safe driving, in which visual, vehicle communication, and vehicle safety cushion considerations are utilized. These points are designed to maximize safe conditions while driving for better accident avoidance.
- Safe backing-up of the vehicle means paying attention to the rear area of the vehicle before proceeding.

We hope this driver safety guide has been of assistance and interest to you. We wish everyone a safe driving experience.

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