



The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

accidents don't have to happen

Volunteer Drivers Handbook



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Introduction

Thousands of people provide their time and services as volunteer drivers to help others. This is vital and positive work, but like all types of driving, it does involve a certain amount of risk.

Driving is one of the most dangerous activities that we do, and driving for work tends to be riskier than driving for private reasons.

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSW Act) and the regulations made under it apply if any organisation (including a voluntary organisation) has at least one employee.

The HSW Act sets out the general duties that employers have towards employees. It also requires employers and the self-employed to protect people other than those at work (e.g. members of the public, volunteers, clients and customers) from risks to their health and safety arising out of, or in connection with, their work activities .

When anyone drives for work, including people who do so as volunteers, both the employer and the individual employee or volunteer share the responsibility of making sure that the risks are properly identified and managed. This requires effective planning.

This handbook is designed to help you work with your organisation to avoid accidents and injuries to yourself, your passengers and other people on the road while you are driving as a volunteer.



Legal matters

Your voluntary organisation needs to know that you are:

- Legally entitled to drive the vehicle you are using
- Using a vehicle that is safe and road legal
- Properly trained and competent to drive it safely
- Using it for suitable purposes.

If the organisation provides the vehicle, they will ensure that it is properly registered, taxed, has a valid MOT (if applicable) and is serviced and insured. Your organisation may ask to check your driver's licence when you start as a volunteer driver and at specified intervals afterwards.

Minibus

If you gained your driving licence after January 1, 1997, you may need to have a D1 entitlement on your licence to drive a minibus. Some, but not all, volunteer drivers who drive a minibus for a non-commercial organisation are exempt from this requirement. If you will be asked to drive a minibus as a volunteer, you will need to check with your organisation whether you are required to have a D1 entitlement.

Using your own vehicle

Even if you are using your own vehicle, the voluntary organisation has the same legal duty to ensure it is safe and legal when it is being used to provide a service for them. Therefore, your organisation may wish to check that your vehicle is taxed, has a valid MOT (if applicable), is serviced and that you are insured to drive it for voluntary purposes.

Motoring offences

Motoring offences, including cautions, summons or convictions, should be reported to your service lead.



Journey planning

It is important to plan your route before every journey. The more planning in advance you can do, the less that unforeseen and risky circumstances will arise, and you will be better prepared to deal with them if they do.

If a journey is to travel somewhere, rather than transporting people or items, then it may be safer to use another form of transport such as the train.

Avoid driving in poor conditions and check the weather forecast before you set off, especially if there has been recent bad weather. If the reported advice is to only make essential journeys then you should follow it.

Preventing driver sleepiness is something that your organisation can help you manage. Crashes caused by driver fatigue are most likely to occur:

- On long journeys on monotonous roads
- Between 2am and 6am
- Between 2pm and 4pm
- After having less sleep than normal
- After drinking alcohol
- On journeys home after night shifts.



As a general rule, drivers should take a 15-minute break after driving for two hours. You need to examine work schedules in advance to ensure that you will not be pressured by time.

Driving at night, especially after a long shift, should also be avoided. Overnight stays can be arranged in order to help drivers stay within daily and weekly driving limits, and avoid crashes due to fatigue.



Fitness to drive

Your voluntary organisation needs to know that you:

- Are fit to drive
- Do not drive when affected by alcohol, drugs or medicines
- Do not drive when affected by illness
- Do not drive when you are too tired to do so safely.

You should inform your organisation about any health issue or personal circumstances that may affect your driving (your organisation may make this a requirement). You are also legally required to inform the DVLA of any medical condition that may affect your ability to drive safely.

For more information:

www.gov.uk/driving-medical-conditions

www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving

Eyesight

In good daylight, you must be able to read a vehicle number plate from 20 metres (about five car lengths) or from 20.5 metres for old-style number plates. If you require glasses or contact lenses to drive, you must wear them at all times when driving. It is an offence not to do so, and may invalidate your motor insurance. Have your eyesight checked regularly (at least once every two years, or more often if your optician recommends it).

Alcohol

Avoid drinking alcohol in the hours before you will be driving (for example, at lunchtime). It can take several hours for alcohol to be removed from your body, and you may still be over the limit, or affected by alcohol the morning after you have been drinking.

Alcohol impairs judgement, making drivers over-confident and more likely to take risks. It slows their reactions, increases stopping distances, impairs judgement of speed and distance and affects vision. Even a small amount, well below the legal limit, seriously affects the ability to drive safely.

The drink-drive limit is 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but lower in Scotland, at 50mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood.



Fitness to drive

Drugs

Do not drive if you have taken any illegal drugs. They can affect your decision-making and driving skills, as well as your physical and mental condition and behaviour, and significantly increase your risk of crashing. The penalties are the same as for drink driving.

It is also illegal in England, Scotland and Wales to drive with certain drugs in the body above a specified limit (even a very small amount would put a person over the limit). The law does not cover Northern Ireland but you could still be arrested if you're unfit to drive.

Medicines

Check with your GP or pharmacist whether any over-the-counter or prescribed medicines you are taking are likely to affect your driving (for example, by causing drowsiness). If so, ask for an alternative that does not, or avoid driving.

Always check the label of medicines and the patient information leaflet to see if there are any warnings. If the label says that certain side effects may occur, assume that they will do so.

Illness

Illness can also affect our ability to drive. We can often be tempted to continue driving, when it would be safer for everyone concerned not to drive until we are feeling better.

If you start to feel unwell while driving, stop the vehicle somewhere safe. If the condition is not serious, you may feel well enough to continue after a short break or taking some medication. But, if you find your concentration is affected, make other arrangements to continue your journey.

Fatigue

Consider whether you are likely to be drowsy or sleepy while driving. Tired drivers are more likely to crash, especially on long monotonous journeys, and in the early hours of the morning.

If you are driving as a volunteer in the evening after a full day's work in other employment, you may also be more tired.

If you think that you are over the drink-drive limit or unfit to drive for any reason, do not drive. Contact your organisation to explain and allow alternative arrangements to be made.

Safe speed

Drivers who travel at higher speeds have less time to identify and react to what is happening around them. It takes them longer to stop. And if there is a crash, it is more severe, causing greater injury to the occupants and any pedestrian or rider they hit.

Higher speeds also magnify other driver errors, such as close-following or driving when tired or distracted, thus multiplying the chances of causing a crash.

Speed limits

Always stay within speed limits even if you think the limit is too low.

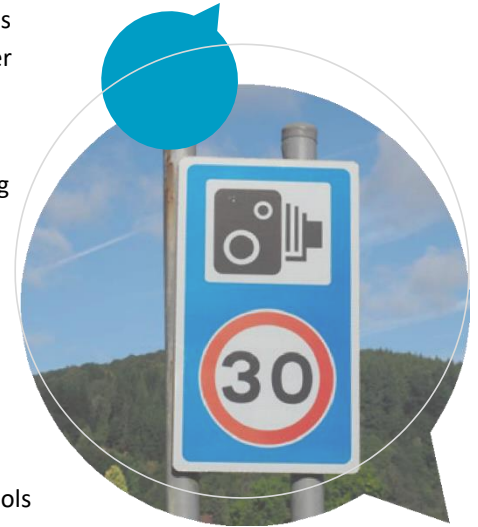
Speed limits set the maximum speed for that road. But, there are many circumstances when it is not safe to drive at that speed (for example, around schools at opening and closing times).

Make sure you know the speed limit of the roads you are using. Speed limit signs tend to be placed at junctions because this is often the point at which the limit changes. However, junctions are also where you need to absorb a wide range of different information and it is easy to miss a speed limit sign when concentrating on one or more other things, such as the intentions of other road users. Get into the habit of checking for speed limit signs at junctions, and looking for repeater signs after the junction, especially if the nature of the road has changed. If you are not sure, assume the limit is lower until you see a sign.

Staying within the limit

The following tips are designed to help you be mindful of your speed:

- Check your speedometer regularly, especially when leaving high-speed roads
- Know the limits – look for signs, especially at junctions
- Assume lamp posts mean 30mph, until signs say otherwise, but remember it could be 20mph
- Remember, speed limits are a maximum, not a target
- 20's plenty when kids are about – and may even be too fast
- Try no higher than 3rd gear in a 30mph limit
- Recognise what makes you speed — keeping up with traffic, overtaking or being tailgated
- Concentrate – distracted drivers speed
- Slow down when entering villages
- Give yourself time – there's no need to speed and you usually won't get there quicker.



Distractions

Driving requires your full concentration all of the time. Trying to do something else while driving will distract you, slow your reactions and increase the risk of crashing.

A wide range of things can distract drivers, including using a mobile phone (speaking, dialling, texting, surfing), inputting directions into a sat nav, reading a map or document, eating, drinking, and smoking.

Mobile phones

It is illegal to use a handheld mobile phone while driving. The penalty for doing so is a £200 fine and six penalty points. Although using a hands-free phone while driving is not specifically illegal, drivers who do so could be charged with “failing to have proper control of their vehicle”. The penalty is a fine of up to £1,000, three penalty points and a discretionary disqualification.

Hands-free phones do not significantly reduce the risks because of the mental distraction of taking part in a phone conversation or glancing at the screen at the same time as driving. A hands-free phone can be used as a sat nav, but only while securely held in a cradle, with the route programmed before the journey. If the driver needs to input new directions, they should only do so when parked in a safe place, with the vehicle engine switched off.

It is also illegal to “cause or permit” a driver to use a handheld mobile phone, and so your organisation should have policies to ensure its drivers do not use a mobile phone while driving.



Driver training

More than 90 per cent of crashes are caused, to some extent, by human error. This ranges from simple mistakes and misjudgements to careless, reckless or aggressive driving. Our ability to anticipate and cope with the mistakes and poor behaviour of others is just as important as our own driving skills and attitudes.

We all develop our own driving style and habits over time, and often do not realise that we could improve our driving.

Driver training can help us to better anticipate and cope with the unexpected, including the errors of other road users. It can make driving safer, less stressful and more enjoyable, as well as reduce costs including those associated with fuel consumption, vehicle wear and tear and insurance.

Your organisation may provide a driver assessment and driver training when you start as a volunteer, on a regular basis, and after an accident or motoring conviction.

Check your organisation's policies on assessment and training – they may be able to assist you in undertaking some refresher or further training. This can take many forms, ranging from classroom sessions to in-vehicle training.



Occupant safety

Seatbelts

The most effective way of protecting people inside vehicles is to make sure that every occupant always wears a seatbelt on every journey, no matter how short the journey. It is just as important for passengers in the rear to wear seatbelts as those in the front.

In a crash at 30mph, an unrestrained person is thrown forward with a force 30 to 60 times their body weight. They are thrown about inside the vehicle, injuring themselves and often seriously injuring other people inside the vehicle.

Child car seats

Seatbelts on their own are less effective for children because they are mainly designed for adults. In the event of a collision, a child may slip out of their seatbelt because it is too big, and an ill-fitting belt could even cause injuries.

The law requires all children travelling in the front or rear seat of any car, van or goods vehicle must use the correct child car seat until they are either 135cm in height or 12-years-old (which ever they reach first). After this they must use an adult seat belt. There are very few exceptions. In cars, vans or goods vehicles, it is your responsibility, as the driver, to ensure that children under 14 are using the correct restraint or seat belt.

The law does not require child restraints to be provided in taxis, private hire vehicles, minicabs, minibuses, buses or coaches, although they must be used if provided.

Seatbelts must be worn, if fitted.

If you are carrying children, ask your organisation about child seats, and about training so you know how to check that the right ones are being used for your child passengers and you are able to fit them correctly.

For more information about transporting other people's children safely:

<https://childcarseats.org.uk/carrying-other-peoples-children/>

Head restraints

Adjust your head restraint correctly, and check that every passenger has their head restraint correctly adjusted. Properly adjusted head restraints help to protect against whiplash, and prevent long-term injuries. The top of the head restraint should be level with the top of your head and it should be as close to the back of your head as possible.



Safe vehicle

Safe vehicle

Vehicle defects are only involved in a small proportion of crashes. However, the type of vehicle also has a major influence on the likelihood and severity of injuries when there is a collision.

Your organisation should have a clear rule that any vehicle that is, or suspected to be, in an unsafe or illegal condition will not be used until all necessary repairs have been completed.

As the driver, you are also responsible for ensuring that the vehicle you are driving is safe and legal.

Before driving any vehicle, check:

- Tyres are undamaged (no cuts or bulges), are at the correct pressure for the number of passengers or equipment being carried, and have enough tread depth. The legal minimum is 1.6mm, but above 3mm gives much shorter braking distances in the wet
- There are no signs of vehicle damage
- Oil, coolant and windscreen wash levels are correct (check when cold)
- You know the correct type of fuel for the vehicle
- Brakes are working
- Lights and indicators are working
- Windscreen and windows are not damaged
- Washers and wipers are working
- Mirrors are correctly positioned
- All occupants are using their seatbelts, and head restraints are adjusted correctly
- Loads are securely restrained.

If you are not sure how to check any of the above, read the vehicle handbook or ask someone to show you. RoSPA's video, vehicle checks (<https://bit.ly/3ow6abE>), may also help.

Ask your organisation if it provides a pre-drive checklist.

If you find any problem during the check, report it to your manager immediately.



Safe vehicle

Driving position

You should be able to see and reach all of the controls comfortably. Good all-round, unobstructed, visibility is vital. Check that your view is not obstructed unnecessarily by objects such as stickers or devices such as sat navs, and that sat navs are not placed where they might be hit and flung forwards by an airbag in the event of a collision.

Consider whether the vehicle is suitable for the task, for example:

- If carrying passengers, is there a seatbelt for each occupant?
- If carrying children, is there an appropriate child seat for each child that needs one?
- If carrying a heavy load or an animal, can you secure it safely?



Emergency procedures

Your organisation should have procedures for emergencies, such as accidents or breakdowns. It is essential that you are familiar with, and follow, these procedures if an emergency occurs.

In the vehicle, keep copies of:

- The emergency procedures
- Contact details for the person(s) to whom you should report emergencies
- Contact details of the breakdown firm your organisation uses and any reference numbers that you may need to quote.

Make sure you have a fully charged mobile phone to summon help if necessary. Do not use the phone while driving.

A summary of the main points to remember is below. But you should always follow the procedures set out by your organisation.

Accidents

- Use hazard warning lights and switch off your engine
- Do not move injured passengers unless they are in immediate danger of further injury from other vehicles or from fire or explosion
- Call the emergency services immediately; provide them with information about the situation, any special circumstances (for example, if carrying oxygen bottles) and if any passengers have additional needs
- If child passengers are present, ensure an adult remains with them
- If the emergency services are called, stay at the scene until they allow you to leave
- Obtain the names and addresses of all independent witnesses (if possible)
- Ensure the vehicle is roadworthy before continuing the journey
- If there is any injury or the names of people involved are not exchanged, you should report the accident to the police as soon as possible or in any case within 24 hours.



Emergency procedures

Breakdowns

- Move the vehicle off the carriageway (onto the hard shoulder or emergency refuge area on a motorway) and switch on the hazard warning lights
- If this is not possible, move it as far away from moving traffic as you can
- Move passengers out of the nearside of the vehicle and as far away from it and other traffic as possible – no one should stand between the vehicle and oncoming traffic
- On motorways or other busy roads, passengers should be taken onto the embankment or grass margin and as far from the traffic as is practicable
- Keep passengers together, keep children under constant supervision
- Call the emergency services, or breakdown firm, giving them accurate details of the vehicle's location, and whether children or passengers with mobility problems are being carried
- Call your nominated contact person to tell them what has happened
- On a motorway, use the roadside emergency telephone as this will enable the police to pinpoint your location.

If you are involved in a collision, discuss the details with your line manager at the next appropriate moment. This will help them ensure that any risk assessments that they have made are relevant and up to date.





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