

## Crashing into winter

Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness is the poetic description for Autumn however, with the clocks going back, the dark nights are coming and Sue Tumelty of The HR Dept says that this is the ideal time for employers to review their driving policies. It is estimated that between 25% and 35% of all road traffic crashes involve someone who was at work at the time. A driver's reactions depend almost entirely on vision, and vision is severely limited at night. Twilight is one of the most difficult times to drive as our eyes are working to adapt to the growing darkness. After a long day at work tiredness is often greater, and this can make driving even more hazardous. For employers there are numerous laws that cover driving and many of these are ignored by employees once they are travelling around the country. According to statistics 31% of the UK's van drivers are not wearing seatbelts, even though they have prevented an estimated 60,000 deaths and 670,000 serious injuries over the last 25 years and are considered to be one of the simplest ways of improving road safety. Smoking in Company vehicles was prohibited in 2007, but how many times do you see drivers and passengers puffing away? There is a lot of confusion around this with employees believing it is acceptable so long as the passenger does not mind. But this will not save them from a fixed penalty fine. Using mobile phones or programming a Sat Nav both substantially increase the risk of a driver crashing. Recent research from The Transport Research Laboratory found that text messaging while driving is more dangerous than drinking and driving. Drivers using mobile phones, whether hand-held or hands-free, are four times more likely to have an accident. In addition to this, if the Company is ringing the employee on their mobile phone at the time of an accident there is a risk that they could face prosecution for corporate manslaughter. But as Sue Tumelty points out, it is the human tragedy behind accidents that make it imperative for sensible and practical driving policies to be in place.

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