

Module 3

DRIVE TO STAY ALIVE - THE HUMAN INFLUENCE

Defensive Driving Course – Basic Level

Module Objectives

By the end of this module you should;

- Be able to identify the effects of alcohol and drugs when driving.
- Be able to know the main causes of driver fatigue.
- Be able to know how to avoid road rage.
- Be able to know the types of distraction and how to avoid them while driving.

Alcohol

- Alcohol is a powerful drug, which slows down the processes occurring in the brain, so that you take longer to react to unexpected situations. It inspires a false sense of confidence, affects your judgment of speed, distance and risk, and reduces your co-ordination, turning avoidable hazards into potentially lethal ones.
- Just one drink will impair your driving to some extent. And because the effects can be quite subtle to begin with, you may feel as though you're perfectly sober.
- It's almost impossible to calculate with any accuracy how much you can drink and be safe to drive, because everyone absorbs alcohol at a different rate, depending on sex, weight, metabolism, age, the type of drink consumed, and how much you've had to eat.
- If you drive after drinking alcohol or taking other drugs you are more likely to be involved in a crash. Alcohol or drugs by themselves are dangerous but the combined effect can be deadly.
- Enforcement of drunk driving and drug driving saves lives. Remember that every police vehicle is a 'booze bus' and the probability that you will be randomly breath tested is high.
- Your license is a valuable privilege. Don't risk your license, your life or the lives of others by driving after you have consumed alcohol and/or taken any drugs that affect your driving.

The effects of alcohol on driving

- Alcohol is absorbed quickly into the blood and travels rapidly to all parts of the body. It affects your brain's ability to make judgements and process information. It also impairs your consciousness and vision.

- Alcohol also gives you a false sense of confidence. You may take more risks than you would normally - but remember, alcohol slows down your reaction time to road hazards.

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC)

- Blood Alcohol Concentration is the quantity of alcohol in the body. It is measured by the weight in grams of alcohol present in 100 milliliters of blood. A person's BAC can be determined by analyzing a blood, breath or urine sample.
- As soon as you start drinking, your BAC begins to rise and could take up to two hours to reach its highest concentration, especially if you have eaten a substantial meal at the same time. Even though you may not have had a drink for an hour or more, your BAC may still be rising.

What is the legal limit?

- It is an offence for a person who holds a Provisional, PSV or Heavy Goods License to drive, or attempt to drive, with a BAC that equals or exceeds 0%.

How long does alcohol stay in your body?

- The body breaks down alcohol very slowly. A healthy person will take about one hour to get rid of the alcohol from one standard drink. So, if you have four standard drinks in an hour, it will take about four hours to get it all out of your system.

Effect of alcohol and other drugs on driving

- Many prescribed and non-prescribed drugs and medicines can seriously affect your driving ability. Drugs such as sedatives or tranquillizers may impair your concentration, make you drowsy and slow down your reaction time. Medications for the common cold or travel sickness can have the same effect. These side effects may last several hours. If you are taking any drugs or medications, check with your doctor or chemist about the effect they may have on your driving ability.

No amount of coffee or soft drink will sober you up – only time can do that. If you drink alcohol and drive, you will find it difficult to:

- judge the speed of your vehicle
- judge the distance between your car and other cars

- notice traffic control signals
- notice pedestrians and other potential hazards
- concentrate on the task of driving
- keep your balance, especially on a motorcycle (or on a bicycle, or as a pedestrian) and
- stay awake when you are driving.

Random Breath Testing (RBT)

- Police may stop motorists and require them to take a breath test. It is a serious offence to refuse a breath test. To pass the test you must be under the limit of 0% BAC for provisional, PSV, Heavy Goods drivers and extraordinary driver license holders, or 0.35 per cent BAC for drivers with full licenses.

Remember, no amount of coffee or soft drink will speed up the breakdown of alcohol in your body.

What the LAW says!

Learners Permit Holders/Provisional Licence Holders/ Heavy Goods

Licence Holders/ PSV Licence Holders 0mg/100ml of blood.

Private Motor Vehicle Drivers with Full Licence 35mg/100ml of breath.

LTA Traffic Act Division 4, Section 105(1)

FATIGUE

Definition

Fatigue is a common term that refers to mental and physical tiredness.

Fatigue causes loss of alertness, drowsiness, poor judgement, slower reactions, reduced driving skill and may cause you to fall asleep at the wheel.

- If you are a driver and you become drowsy, you can drift into a 'micro-sleep', which is a brief nap that lasts for around three to five seconds. At 90km per

hour (illegal speed) your vehicle can travel over 100 metres in that time, which is enough time for it to run off the road, into a tree, another vehicle or a pedestrian.

Driver Fatigue

- Driver fatigue (driving when you are tired) is a major road safety hazard. Fatigue related crashes tend to be severe because sleepy drivers don't take evasive action. The risk of serious injury to a driver, passengers or the occupants of other vehicles in this type of crash is very high.

The main causes of fatigue

- Body Clock Factors
 - Your body runs on a natural biological cycle of 24-26 hours - often called your 'body clock'. Your body clock programs you to sleep at night and to stay awake during the day.
 - Your body clock is controlled partly by light and dark and partly by what you do. If you normally work from 9am to 5pm, some of the things that happen to you as a result of your body clock are:
 - the morning light tells your body clock to make you more alert (wakes you up); during the morning your body clock keeps you alert;
 - after lunch, your body clock will turn your alertness down for a couple of hours: (afternoon fiesta)
 - your body clock will make you most alert and aware in the late afternoon and early evening;
 - darkness in the evening tells your body clock to turn your alertness down again so you can get ready to sleep; and
 - after midnight your body clock will turn your alertness right down so that you are 'switched off' between 2am and 6am. At this time all your body functions are at their lowest level.
- Information from road crashes shows that this is true. Although there are fewer drivers on the road between midnight and 6am, statistics show that they can be up to 20 times more likely to have a crash during those hours.

Sleep Factors

- The only way to prevent fatigue, is to get enough sleep.
- Seven and a half hours' sleep is generally recognized as an average and normal need. If you get much less than this, you will suffer fatigue. You will feel tired during the day but you will feel much worse at night when your body clock turns your alertness down.
- You will also be a danger to yourself and others on the road. If you have not had any sleep for 17-18 hours, your ability to drive will be the same as if you had a BAC of 0.05%. Not only is that way over the 0% BAC limit for a probational, (PSV and Heavy Goods) driver, but it also means your crash risk doubles.
- You may like to go out at night and stay out until the early hours of the morning. Just be aware that if you drive when you have not had enough sleep you are taking a big risk. If you crash because you are not alert, you are likely to be held responsible; **that is if you wake up again!**

Work Factors

- Long working hours or study hours or physically tiring work can affect your ability to drive. If you are a shift worker, then you need to take extra care.
- Research shows that shift workers are six times more likely to be involved in 'fatigue-related' road crashes than other workers.

Health Factors

- There are a number of medical factors that can prevent you from getting the long periods of sleep that you need to feel refreshed and alert.
- If you had enough sleep during the night but you still feel tired and drowsy during the day you should consult your doctor. Look after your health and fitness. The healthier and fitter you are, the better you will sleep and the more alert you will be when driving.
- Stimulant drugs only delay sleep. When they wear off there can be a sudden onset of sleepiness, which is very dangerous, especially if you are driving.

Be honest with yourself. If you have any of these warning signs while you are driving, stop immediately and take a break. Once fatigue sets in, there is nothing you can do about it except stop immediately and take a break or a nap.

STOP! REVIVE! SURVIVE!

What are the warning signs of driver fatigue?

- There are a number of warning signs to indicate that you are becoming too tired to drive safely. Some of the warning signs are:
 - you keep yawning
 - your eyes feel sore or heavy
 - you start day dreaming and not concentrating on your driving
 - you start hallucinating
 - your reactions seem slow
 - your driving speed increases or decreases unintentionally
 - your vehicle wanders over the road

Ways to reduce driver fatigue

- Here are some tips to help you keep alert at the wheel:
 - get plenty of sleep before you start driving on long trips;
 - provide adequate time for sleep, rest and food during long trips;
 - take regular breaks (at least every two hours) to walk and have a stretch;
 - get fresh air into your vehicle (smoke and stale air can contribute to drowsiness); and
 - learn to recognize the signs of sleepiness and pull over as soon as possible for a short break.

ROAD RAGE

Definition

Violent attitude shown by drivers in traffic often because of stress or when annoyed by other drivers, etc

- Why do otherwise normal, law-abiding people turn into violent maniacs when they get behind the wheel? Research surveys show that most road- rage offenders believe themselves to be the victims of another's bad driving.
- They interpret some simple incident like being overtaken or cut in on as a threat, and respond aggressively.
- Or they react to antisocial behavior, such as driving too slowly or hogging the overtaking lane, by setting out to teach the other driver a lesson. This leads to headlight flashing, horn tooting, obscene gestures and verbal abuse, which can in turn escalate into tailgating or deliberately obstructing the other vehicle's progress.

- While this sort of activity is going on, those involved get so caught up in the battle that they lose sight of the risks they are taking. They ignore the traffic around them, the condition of the road surface, the rules of the road and particularly the speed limit.
- **Stay Calm.** Avoid letting yourself get stressed. Concentrate on your driving. Don't get into the car fuming over a row you've just had - that's giving road rage a head start. Don't set yourself an impossible deadline which the traffic won't allow you to keep - leave plenty of time for your journey, plan for delays. Play soothing music; think calmly and logically about the task in hand - giving a running commentary on your driving may help to focus the mind.
- When you feel the stress mounting, try counting to ten or deep breathing exercises, or pull over when safe to do so and take a break. If you know you are overwrought and having difficulty controlling your emotions, don't drive. Seek counseling or take steps to sort yourself out before you do something you will regret.

Be Tolerant

- You're not a mind reader, so why assume that the other driver is deliberately trying to annoy you?
- Chances are it is a genuine mistake, so let it go. And when you make a mistake yourself, take an apologetic and courteous attitude. Most people respond in kind, so courtesy will smooth over a potentially explosive situation, while abuse will make it worse.

Concentration or Anticipation

- Concentrate on your driving.
- Remember, safety is paramount.
- Think of the consequences dangerous driving can have.

To avoid being an aggressive driver:

- Allow plenty of time to get to your destination and plan your journey to avoid rush hours.
- Improve the comfort in your vehicle and understand that you cannot control the traffic.
- Don't drive when you are angry.
- Listen to soothing music when you drive.

- Listen to traffic and weather reports to learn of potential delays and hazards.

To be a courteous driver:

- Do not tailgate.
- Use your horn sparingly.
- Do not block the passing lane.
- Provide appropriate distance when cutting in after passing another vehicle.
- Use your signals to indicate a turn or lane change.
- Concentrate on your driving-not on your cell phone, stereo, passengers or other distractions.
- Avoid unnecessary use of your high beam headlights.

To handle an aggressive driver

- Get out of the way and let an aggressive driver pass.
- Avoid direct eye contact.
- Never try to teach an aggressive driver a lesson.
- Do not react to provocation.
- If you are followed, drive to a police station or a busy public place. Do not drive home or get out of your car.
- Ignore gestures and refuse to return them.

DISTRACTION

Distraction is the diversion of attention of an individual (driver) from the chosen object of attention (which is the road) onto the source of distraction.

Hint: Turn off your telephone before driving

- There's so much to pay attention to when you drive. You have to see what is going on around you. You need to be sure that other drivers know where you are and what you plan to do. You have to keep adjusting your speed and

vehicle position to driving conditions. You have to be alert to any surprises that might turn into emergencies.

- With all these going on, you need to be sure that no distractions inside your car will take your attention away from your driving and increase your risk.
- Eliminate distraction wherever possible. Physical discomfort can take your mind off the road, so dress in loose-fitting clothes, wear sensible footwear, adjust your seat to a comfortable position, and visit the toilet before you depart.
- Tidy up the interior so that there are no loose items to fall about when you accelerate, brake or corner. Make sure that the driver's foot area is kept clear, because if something were to roll under the pedals, it could prevent you from applying the brake in an emergency.

How can distractions hinder your driving ability?

- Imagine that you are driving along on a busy highway. Suddenly you see a car beside you have never seen before, so you take your eyes off the road ahead for just a second to get a closer look. Just then another car pulls ahead of you, and you have to brake hard. You have let yourself become distracted from your driving responsibilities. You almost crashed into another car.
- Lots of events can distract you as you drive. It's important to be aware of these distractions so that you can be a safe and responsible driver.

A car radio can distract you

- Most cars have radios, tape and CD decks, but don't let yourself become so interested in the music that you forget to pay attention to your driving. Don't forget: loud music can mask useful information.
- Your concentration must be focused on driving. Looking for and changing tapes or CDs is also a distraction and very dangerous. Risk is increased any time you take your eyes off the road or drive with only one hand on the wheel.

Headphones can be Dangerous

- If you are wearing headphones, you may not be able to hear another car honking its horn at you. You might lose your concentration if you are too absorbed in what you are hearing on your headphones.

Put them away, you can listen to your personal stereo at other time. Your job is to pay attention to your driving.

Passengers can distract you

- Sometimes the people in your car want you to pay more attention to them than to your driving.
e.g They might ask you to turn around and look at what they are doing.
- Sometimes they can be talking so loudly that you can't even hear yourself think. At other times, passengers may try to roughhouse in the car or hang out the windows.
- **You are responsible for the safety of your passengers, and it is your responsibility to tell them to sit still or be quiet.**
- You can explain that you will pay attention to them when you get where you are going. You are not being rude but being a safe and responsible driver.
- Little children can become restless on long trips. They can start fighting with each other or try to take off their safety belts. You can make sure that children behave by telling them the rules before you start driving and by keeping them quietly occupied or have some reading books available.
- You also have to think about children's needs. To avoid boredom, children need to have something to do. Make sure you have some tape cassettes or CD's for them to listen to in the car or quiet games for them to play. Be mindful of the volume though you can also stop more often than you normally would and let the children get out and stretch their legs.

Smoking

- Don't Smoke and Drive
- Smoking seriously damage your health. In the long term smoking while driving can kill you in seconds. For as long as that cigarette lasts, it's placing you and your passengers in jeopardy.
- To start with, concentration is lost while you search for the cigarette packet and lighter. To light up you have to take one hand off the wheel (Two hands are needed to light a match).
- Once the cigarette is lit, you need one hand to hold it or remove it from you lips. The ash has to be flicked somewhere, which means using the ashtray or flicking it out of the open window (with a risk of it being blown back into you eyes).

- Sometimes when the smoker tries to take the cigarette from their mouth it sticks to the lips, so that the hand slides down, nipping off the hot tip, which drops into the lap causing your attention to be diverted yet again.
- When the cigarette is finished it must be extinguished and disposed of. Using the ashtray involves taking a hand off the wheel, throwing the cigarette out of the window could injure cyclists or pedestrians, or cause grass fires.

Mobile Phones - Dialling for disaster

- Cell phones are an important part of everyday life, but using a wireless phone while driving increases your chance of getting into an accident. So what can you do? How can you be a safe driver if you absolutely have to use your phone while traveling? Wireless phone manufacturers suggest a number of good options:
- Pull off the road and stop in a safe place before using your phone. When the phone rings, let it ring. It's better to use your phone's voicemail or even miss a call than to put yourself, your passengers or others at risk.
- Become very familiar with your phone before using it on the road. Never take notes or jot down numbers while driving.

Remember:

Driving safely is always more important than using the phone.

External Distractions

The urge to "get a good look" at the scene of an accident or at cars that have been stopped by police can be almost overwhelming. Remember, letting your concentration be diverted by these common driving distractions can be deadly:

- Roadside activities such as:
 - Accidents or vehicles stopped by police
 - Friends in other vehicles
 - Roadside advertising
 - Construction areas
 - Scenic views

Other Distractions

- Driving with animals in the car can be dangerous. A dog can suddenly jump on your lap. Or a cat can crawl under your feet and land on the gas pedal. You have to plan ahead if you are going to take an animal in your car.

- Keep them caged for the duration of the trip, or ask a friend to come with you and hold the animal by its leash. If you travel with pets frequently, you should be aware that pet safety belts are available at specialty shops. Many drivers become distracted in traffic jams. They get stuck for a long time and lose their concentration.

Remember, even when you are stopped, it is important to pay attention to everything that is going on around you.

Module Summary

- Alcohol affects your brain's abilities to make good judgement and process information.
- Body clock, sleep, work and health factors are components of fatigue.
- Tolerance is an important factor when encountering road rage.
- Car radio, headphones, mobile phones, smoking, passengers and animals are major distractions while driving.