WINTER DRIVING SAFETY

Driving in the cold months of winter can be dangerous and intimidating. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) reports that motor vehicle accidents cost employers an annual average of $60 billion in medical costs, legal expenses, property damage and lost productivity. According to the Federal Highway Administration, more than 1,300 people are killed every year in the U.S. due to wrecks caused from wintry road conditions. Winter weather-related wrecks also make up 24% of wrecks that occur annually throughout the nation.

Employers can help prevent winter-related motor vehicle accidents by implementing a safe driving program within their companies. According to the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), employers should establish the "NETS 10-Step Program" to minimize crash risks. The steps are listed below:

- Set guidelines and implement initial program policies.
- Develop written policies and procedures and share them with all employees to emphasize your stance on driver safety.
- Require employees to sign safe-driving agreements.
- Carry out employee Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) checks.
- Establish a crash reporting and investigation process that reviews all accident details to help prevent further crashes.
- Ensure the safety of company vehicles' maintenance and regular inspection.
- Develop a disciplinary action system that determines the penalty for an employee who is involved in an accident of their fault and/or is cited for a moving violation.
- Create a reward and incentive program that honors employees with safe driving records.
- Provide continuous driver safety training and communication to employees that encourages safe driving practices.
- Ensure regulatory compliance is met among employee drivers. Establish which local, state and federal regulations govern your company vehicles and drivers.

PREPARE, PREVENT AND PROTECT

According to OSHA, employees should follow "The Three P's" while driving during the winter months: prepare, prevent and protect.

- **Maintain your car:** Always check your battery, tire tread and windshield wipers. Keep your windows clear; do not put no-freeze fluid in the washer reservoir and check your antifreeze.
- **Always carry** a flashlight, jumper cables, abrasive material (sand, kitty litter, floor mats), shovel, snowbrush and ice scraper, warning devices (flares) and blankets. For long trips, add food and water, medication and a cell phone.
- **Stopped or stalled?** Stay with your car, don't over exert, put bright markers on antenna or windows and shine the dome light. If you run your car, make sure to clear your exhaust pipe and run it just enough to stay warm.
- **Plan your route:** Allow plenty of time (check the weather and leave early if necessary), be familiar with the maps/directions and let others know your route and planned arrival time.

OTHER TIPS:

- Slow down and increase your distance between cars.
- Keep your eyes open for pedestrians walking along the road.
- Avoid fatigue – get plenty of rest prior to your trip. Stop at least every three hours and rotate drivers if possible.

Make sure you are aware of your company's policy before getting behind the wheel, especially in bad weather.