

In this issue of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Listserv – December 11, 2019

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1. Situational Preparedness – False Sense of Security from Hands-free Devices

According to the National Safety Council, cell phone use while driving leads to 1.6 million crashes annually and there may be more as drivers hesitate to admit they were using a mobile device. Many states have laws against driving while holding a cell phone. While using a hands-free system honors the letter of the law, does that solve the problem of distracted driving? Hands-free devices help drivers keep their hands on the wheel, but the driver's mind is still not on the task at hand...driving. Hands-free technology for mobile phone use can lead to a false sense of security while the driver is still distracted! Studies have shown that any cell phone use provides distraction similar to driving drunk.

How can you avoid the temptation? Certain newer phones automatically put your phone on "Do Not Disturb" while driving. There is an app available for older Android phones that does the same thing. Or you could just go "low tech" with your "tech" and silence or turn off your device!

Resources

- Kleinman, J. (2018, May 17). How to Get 'Do Not Disturb While Driving' Mode for Any Android Phone. Retrieved from <https://lifelacker.com/how-to-get-do-not-disturb-while-driving-for-any-android-1826110949>.
- Lenahan, M. C. (2019, October 22). The False Sense of Security from Distracted Driving Policies. Retrieved from https://www.ehstoday.com/safety/false-sense-security-distracted-driving-policies?NL=OH-05&Issue=OH-05_20191022_OH-05_106&sfvc4enews=42&cl=article_1_b&utm_rid=CPG03000001591939&utm_campaign=37938&utm_medium=email&elq2=0e0ab51792a84e74a0f9b211ce3ac909&oly_enc_id=2894C7426278G7W.
- Distracted Driving Statistics 2019: The Zebra. (2019, April 9). Retrieved from <https://www.thezebra.com/distracted-driving-statistics/>.

2. Holiday Safety

The festive holiday season is underway. To keep the season festive, think about safety during your preparations and activities. Here are some tips to avoid hazards and keep the holiday season “merry.”

Hanging lights/decorations:

- Use a properly designed ladder or stepstool to decorate areas beyond your reach.
- Inspect the ladder to be sure it has non-skid feet, no visible damage, and has the proper rating to hold not only your weight but also the weight of the decorations/tools you will be using.
- Make sure stepladders are fully unfolded prior to use. Do not stand on the top rung, climb on the backside of the ladder, or lean out to the side of the ladder.

Electrical hazards:

- Carefully inspect holiday lights and discard or recycle any with frayed or nicked cords or loose connections. Always turn off holiday lights, both indoors and out, when you leave the house unattended or retire for the night.
- Do not use power strips in series for indoor holiday electrical needs, rather arrange items so power strips can be plugged directly into a permanently installed outlet.
- When purchasing/using light strings, extension cords, spotlights, or electrical decorations, look for the certification mark of an accredited organization such as UL (Underwriter’s Laboratories). Before using lights outdoors make sure they have been certified for outdoor use.
- Do not use extension cords in series, rather use a cord long enough to reach the outlet without stretching, but not so long as to become easily tangled. Plug all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground-fault circuit interrupters to avoid potential shocks.
- When hanging outdoor lights keep electrical connectors off the ground and away from metal rain gutters. Use insulated tape or plastic clips to hold them in place, not metal nails or tacks. Ensure your lights and cords are rated for outdoor use.

Fire safety:

- Test your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors if you have not recently done so, and make sure that they are UL-listed.
- Choose a Christmas tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched. Water the tree daily. Keep the tree at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators, portable heaters, or other heat sources. When purchasing an artificial tree look for the label “Fire Resistant.”

- Use noncombustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Read instructions on the number of light strands to connect.
- Make sure trees and other decorations do not block exits.
- Do not burn wrapping paper in a fireplace. Keep candles away from decorations and other things that can burn. Two of every five home decoration fires are started with candles. Extinguish all candles when you leave a room or go to bed.

These are just a few tips to help keep you safe during the holidays. Look around your home for other hazards.

Resources

- EHS **Ladder Safety** SOP <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-ladder.pdf>
- EHS **General Electrical Safety** SOP <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-electricalsafety.pdf>
- NFPA “Winter holiday safety:” Christmas Tree Safety Tips <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/ChristmasTreeSafetyTips.pdf>
- NFPA “Winter holiday safety:” Winter Holiday Safety Tips https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/Winter_Holiday_Safety.pdf
- Consumer Products Safety Commission “Holiday Safety Information Center” <https://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Education-Centers/holiday-safety>
- Parents.com “12 Tips for Holiday Home Safety” <http://www.parents.com/holiday/christmas/safety/12-tips-for-holiday-home-safety/>

3. Safety Posters – Safety Posters & New Year’s Resolutions

EHS has developed a number of safety posters of relevance to the campus community. Following are two to consider as you think about New Year’s Resolutions for 2020:



Order your FREE posters today. Contact ehs@unl.edu or 402-472-4925 with your name, campus mailing address including Zip+4, and quantity desired.

Resources

- Safety Posters <https://ehs.unl.edu/safety-posters>

4. Near Miss Reporting Helps Everyone

A campus-wide initiative, led by the Chancellor's University Safety Committee (CUSC) is underway to encourage all UNL employees to report unsafe practices and near misses. A near miss is an incident where no property was damaged and no personal injury sustained, but where, given a slight shift in time or position, damage and/or injury or illness easily could have occurred. This type of situation is often thought of as a "close call." The purpose of such reporting is to identify and abate contributing factors before they result in personal injury/illness or property damage.

By reporting these circumstances, you are contributing to a safer and healthier campus environment. Information reported is shared throughout the University for educational/awareness purposes. Specific identifying information (e.g., names, departments, etc.) is removed before reporting on an incident. We appreciate your participation and assure you that there is no risk of repercussions for reporting a situation or hazard.

To support this effort, the EHS "Near Miss/Close Call Incident Reporting Form," revised to include unsafe practices as well as near misses, is online through the EHS website. EHS also has available business-card size handouts containing the URL to report. Please consider requesting a number of these Near Miss/Close Call reporting informational cards to share with those in your area. To request any quantity of these business-card size handouts contact EHS at 402-472-4925 or ehs@unl.edu.

Resources

- *Near Miss/Close Call Incident Reporting Form* <https://ehs.unl.edu/near-missclose-call-incident-reporting-form>

5. Revised Safe Operating Procedure

- **Door Postings for Potentially Hazardous Locations**
https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-door_posting_1.pdf

Updated with new sample images of door postings reflecting the change in formatting of the placards. There is a new pictogram for Cryogenic Materials. Pictograms for Electromagnetic Radiation or Magnetic Fields

will no longer be used as the locations with these hazards on campus do not meet the regulatory requirement for a pictogram to be posted.

The information about biohazard symbols on the door postings is also updated as we now have combined biohazard door posting information onto our standard door postings for labs with human biohazards present. Details about these postings can be found in the recently revised **Biohazard Door Postings** SOP (https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-bio-door_postings_2.pdf).

Remember...SAFETY IS AN ATTITUDE!

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