

In this issue of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Listserv – April 3, 2024

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1. Situational Preparedness – Distracted Driving

April is national Distracted Driving Awareness Month and a good time to regroup and take responsibility for your choices made on the road. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 3,522 lives were lost in 2021 due to distracted driving, 400 more than in 2020.

The Nebraska Department of Transportation's Highway Safety Office used new digital technology to measure the number of distracted drivers in Nebraska recently. Results showed that 1 in 10 drivers you meet on the road are not looking where they are driving, but instead are focusing on a cellphone or other distraction! This figure is up 7% from figures reported in a 2021 NHTSA study.

Tips to Avoid Distracted Driving:

- **Before you start your trip, get comfortable.** Adjust your seat and mirrors and set your navigation system before operating the vehicle.
- **Put your cell phone out of sight to prevent temptation.** Use your cell phone for emergency situations only. Pull off the road and stop to call or text. Handsfree use is a distraction too.
- **If you are drowsy, pull off the road.**
- **You should limit the number of passengers, as well as the level of activity inside the car.** Ask passengers to help navigate, change the radio station, make a call, or send a message. Pull over to address situations involving children in the car.
- **Secure your pets so they cannot move around inside the vehicle.** Unsecured pets can be a distraction and interfere with your use of vehicle controls.

- **Make sure possessions in your car are secured.** It can be tempting to reach for items such as bags or water bottles if they are rolling around on the floor.
- **Avoid activities such as shaving, putting on makeup or eating while driving.** Do these tasks before starting out or wait until you have reached your destination.
- **Do your “multitasking” outside the car before or after the trip.** If something arises that needs attention, safely pull over.

Don't think you are distracted? Here are some signs of distracted driving:

- Nearly striking an object, vehicle, or pedestrian.
- Failure to safely maintain lane control.
- Driving into an opposing lane, crossing the center line.
- Slow response to traffic signals.

With traffic fatalities in Nebraska at a 15-year high, all drivers need to do everything possible to avoid crashes. Distracted driving is tempting - but it is proven that we simply cannot multi-task and give our full attention to the road. Put your phone down, limit distractions and focus on traveling to and from your destination safely.

Resources

- *How Much Do You Really Know About Distracted Driving?* (n.d.). <https://living.acg.aaa.com/auto/top-driving-distractions>
- *April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month | NHTSA.* (n.d.). NHTSA. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/april-distracted-driving-awareness-month>
- *Distracted Driving | NHTSA.* (n.d.). NHTSA. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/distracted-driving>
- *Distracted Driving Put Bad Passengers on Do Not Disturb.* (n.d.). Nebraska Department of Transportation. Retrieved March 27, 2023, from <https://dot.nebraska.gov/safety/driving/distracted/>
- *Distracted to Death – Safety Training Video – Avoid Accidents Reduce Distractions* (Safety Memos, Duration 1:43 min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKI3s-A3-Ks>

2. Severe Weather Awareness

Severe weather can happen anytime, in any part of the country. Whether you work on campus or in the field, do you know what to do in the event of

severe weather? Unless you've recently taken the EHS web-based **Emergency Preparedness** training, now would be a good time to review that online training and related resources including the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's SAFETY AT NEBRASKA website and the resources provided there.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Weather Service, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration have a number of useful resources covering a variety of weather hazards. Here are short reminders from Ready.gov about how to deal with several types of natural disaster:

- **Lightning.** Lightning is a leading cause of injury and death from weather-related hazards. When thunder roars, go indoors!
- **Tornados.** Tornados can happen anytime anywhere and increasingly are common any time of the year. When a warning is issued you need to take shelter immediately. Always be aware of the location of the nearest tornado shelter.
- **Flooding.** Floods are the most common natural disaster in the United States. Do not try to walk, swim or drive through flood waters. Turn Around, Don't Drown!
- **Earthquake.** Injuries usually result from falling debris. When the earth shakes, drop, cover and hold on.

A number of areas across the university have established Emergency Action Plans. Does your building have one? If not, now would be a good time to set one up. You can download a template from the university's SAFETY AT NEBRASKA website. If your area does have an Emergency Action Plan, review it now to be sure you are familiar with the components.

The EHS Safe Operating Procedure **Communication of Work Area Safety Information** contains a checklist with various items including a section on "Emergency Preparedness." The checklist assists both workers and supervisors by identifying relevant action items for new/current workers.

Review the resources listed for more in-depth guidance on preparing for and responding to various types of severe weather.

Resources

- EHS web-based Emergency Preparedness training
<https://ehs.unl.edu/web-based-training#EP>

- SAFETY AT NEBRASKA website <https://safety.unl.edu/>
- Ready "It's Not Luck" <https://www.ready.gov/>
- Great ShakeOut Earthquake Drills <https://www.shakeout.org/dropcoverholdon>
- National Weather Service Lightning Safety Tips and Resources <https://www.weather.gov/safety/lightning>
- OSHA Factsheet "Lightning Safety When Working Outdoors" <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3863.pdf>
- NOAA "The Online Tornado FAQ" <https://www.spc.noaa.gov/faq/tornado/>
- EHS Safe Operating Procedure Communication of Work Area Safety Information <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-workareasafety.pdf>

3. 2023 Annual Stormwater Report - Feedback

EHS recently submitted the 2023 Annual Stormwater Report to the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) and is now soliciting feedback from the campus community. Comments on either the 2023 Annual Report or the Stormwater Management Plan can be directed to EHS using the "Submit Comments" link on the Stormwater Management web page: <https://ehs.unl.edu/stormwater-management>.

4. Volunteer Litter Cleanup Event 4/19/24!

VOLUNTEER for Litter Cleanup

Students, faculty, and staff are invited to join Environmental Health & Safety, IANR, and Agronomy & Horticulture for a litter cleanup at the Deadman's Run Tributary.

When:

April 19th, 2024,
between 8a-12p.

Where:

4401 Fair St,
Lincoln, NE 68503

We Recommend:

- Long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and close-toed shoes
- Sunscreen
- Bug spray



Visit the link to sign up:

[https://go.unl.edu/
litter_cleanup_signup](https://go.unl.edu/litter_cleanup_signup)

For further information or questions please contact Jennifer Weisbrod at jweisbrod2@unl.edu, John Hay at jhay2@unl.edu, Patrick Boulas pboulas2@unl.edu



5. Safety Spotlight – Sharps Use & Disposal

EHS is shining a “spotlight” on the top 10 safety and compliance deficiencies in 2023. The final deficiency highlighted in this series relates to handling of sharps.

In general, a “sharp” is any item capable of cutting or penetrating the skin. Sharps are not just found in laboratories. Examples of sharps include:

- A razor blade, X-Acto®-type knife or box cutter.
- A scalpel or any type of knife.
- Hypodermic syringes and needles that may be used for transferring liquids in a chemistry laboratory or any other research purpose.
- Glass pipettes.
- Broken glassware including cups and glasses for personal use.
- Metals with un-filed sharp edges.
- Nails, brads or tacks.

Some items are inherently sharp, and some become sharp only after damage. Sharps are certainly a physical hazard by themselves, but once the skin is penetrated, a pathway exists for contaminants to enter the body.

Appropriate technique is the most essential factor in avoiding sharps injuries. Minimize chances of a cut or puncture by the following:

- **Avoid using sharps** whenever possible. Choose plasticware over glass whenever possible.
- **Sheath sharp tools/needles** when not in use and only if doing such does not create the risk of a cut or puncture.
- **Lubricate glassware** with glycerin or water before attempting to insert into stoppers or gaskets.
- **Store sharps when not in use** in a designated area where clearly visible, for example in a shallow drawer with an organizer.
- **Do not carry unguarded or uncapped sharps from one area to another** or in a pocket. Do not pick up a razor blade or scalpel blade by hand.
- **Never point a sharp** toward yourself or others.

- **Wear cut-resistant gloves** when performing higher-risk work, for example, cutting small samples where fingers must be near the workpiece.

Sharps disposal can be the most hazardous part of work with sharps.

- Dispose sharps immediately after use.
- Use a container designed for disposal of sharps. Fill only 75-80% before sealing and replacing. Forcing a cap onto an overfull sharps container can cause sharps to penetrate the container.
- Never dispose of any sharps in plastic bags.
- Use a heavy cardboard box for broken glass.
- Clean up broken glass with a tongs or brush and dustpan, never by hand.

All sharps must be handled with vigilance during use. Sharps must be disposed of in a manner that protects you and others from exposure and possible injury.

Resources

- Sharps Use and Handling with Livestock https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-sharps_use_%26_handling_livestock.pdf
- Sharps – Handling and Disposing https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-bio-sharps-handling_disposing.pdf
- Glass Disposal – Intact or Broken https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-glass_disposal.pdf

ADOPT SAFETY AS YOUR ATTITUDE – DON'T LEARN BY ACCIDENT!

Environmental Health and Safety

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