Speed Kills

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As a professional driver, you know first-hand the dangers of driving too fast for conditions. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in 2019 there were 9,478 fatalities in crashes where at least one driver was speeding, amounting to 26 percent of total traffic fatalities for the year. That same year produced an estimated 326,000 people injured in speeding-related crashes.

Drivers who were speeding when involved in fatal crashes were found to have blood alcohol concentrations (BACs) of .08 g/dL or greater—or even higher BACs of .15 g/dL or greater—than those drivers who were not speeding. Additionally, 86% percent of speeding-related fatalities occurred on non-interstate roadways. Speeding-related fatalities, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association, are associated with a number of factors, including driver characteristics, risky behaviors such as alcohol-impaired driving, marijuana-impaired driving or failure to buckle up, and environmental factors such as the road environment and driving conditions.

Several years ago, NHTSA reported that speeding increases crash risk in two ways: it increases the likelihood of being involved in a crash, and it increases the severity of injuries sustained by all road users in a crash.

The relationship between speed and crash involvement is complex and it is affected by factors such as road type, driver age, alcohol impairment, and roadway characteristics like curvature, grade, width, and adjacent land use. In contrast, the relationship between speed and injury severity is consistent and direct. Higher vehicle speeds lead to larger changes in velocity in a crash and these velocity changes are closely linked to injury severity. This relationship is especially critical for pedestrians involved in a motor vehicle crash, due to their lack of protection.

Sadly, we have made limited progress on the issue of speeding. Speeding still remains a publicly accepted driving behavior, which is reinforced among motorists, policymakers and transportation stakeholders. National surveys of U.S. drivers have found that although drivers identify speeding as risky, drivers nonetheless continue to speed. Too many drivers have a minimal perception of risk of either getting a ticket, causing a crash or violating social norms.

As professionals, we have the responsibility to take a number of key action steps to better address speeding, regardless of any policy, enforcement or technology. Below are some tips that will help you maintain a safe speed for various driving conditions.

- **Know before you go.** Arrive for your shift early. Know road and traffic conditions and don't be in a hurry.
- **Reduce your driving speed in adverse road or weather conditions.** Adjust your speed to safely match weather conditions, road conditions, visibility and traffic.
- **Enter curves slowly.** Speed limits posted on curve warning signs are intended for passenger vehicles, not large trucks. Large trucks should reduce their speed even more. Studies have shown large trucks entering a curve, even at the posted speed limit, have lost control and rolled over due to their high center of gravity. Some 40% of speeding-related fatalities occur on curves.
- **Reduce speed before entering an exit/entrance ramp.** In a similar vein, approach an exit/entrance ramp at a safe speed.
- **Drive slowly with a loaded trailer.** Loaded trailers have a higher center of gravity and sudden speed adjustment may cause the load to shift, leading to skidding or a rollover.
- **Slow down in work zones.** Before entering a work zone, decrease your speed, merge into the correct lane well ahead of any lane closures and be prepared to slow down or stop suddenly.