

Instructor Notes: Dehydration is not something limited to camels crossing the Sahara Desert. It is a real problem with very real consequences that can affect every person driving a truck, especially towing operators. Use this safety meeting to share the dangers of dehydration with your employees and teach them what they can do to prevent it from happening to themselves.



Safety Meeting 2016 #7 – “Dry” Driving Is Similar to Drunk Driving



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Welcome to July ... traditionally the hottest month of the year. But is it getting hotter? According to U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), July 2015 was the hottest month ever recorded. *Ever*. I know the dramatic rise in temps is alarming, but this article is not about how to stop global warming but rather what you can do to protect yourself while working in warm weather.

First, dehydration is a real concern to all towing operators, not just those working in the warmer “sun-belt” states. Everyone is constantly losing water. As you breathe, as you sweat, as you go to the bathroom and even as you enjoy air conditioning, you are constantly losing water. To make matters worse, truck drivers are especially prone to dehydration since they usually don’t drink enough water because they want to avoid frequent bathroom breaks, but the risk in this case is much worse than the time loss. In fact, research from the Loughborough University (England) determined that even being mildly dehydrated is the same as driving drunk in terms of making errors in judgment and performance. During the study, a group of male drivers was evaluated while driving in a simulator. When normally hydrated, the men made 47 driving errors. When dehydrated, their scores got much worse, more than doubling with 101 driving mistakes that included lane drifting, late braking and touching or crossing the center line.

Dehydration Symptoms

There is an old saying that says by

the time you’re thirsty you’re too late because you’re already dehydrated and it has some truth. So how can you tell if you aren’t drinking enough water?

According to the Mayo Clinic, signs of *mild to moderate* dehydration include dry, sticky mouth, sleepiness, tiredness or fatigue, dry or flushed skin, headache, dizziness or lightheadedness and loss of appetite.

Signs for *severe* dehydration include low blood pressure, rapid heart-beat and rapid breathing.

Unfortunately, thirst isn’t always a reliable gauge of the body’s need for water, especially in older adults. A better indicator is the color of your urine: clear or light-colored urine means you’re well hydrated, whereas a dark yellow or amber color usually signals dehydration.

Avoiding Dehydration

Drink water throughout the day and even more when you’re working hard and sweating a lot. Medical studies show that a typical male needs 1.5 to 3 liters a day in fluids depending on activity. Keep a refillable water bottle (non-BPA of course) in your truck and refill it as needed. If plain water doesn’t work for you, consider adding sliced lemons or lemon juice to the water.

Don’t count alcoholic or highly-caffeinated drinks toward your total because they are often counter-productive and may lead to more frequent urination.

Avoid sugary drinks such as sports drinks and sodas. The sugar in those drinks has no health benefits and if

you’re not very active, the sodium and potassium are completely unnecessary. Water is cheaper and better for you.

Eat water-rich foods at lunch or snacks. Keep in mind that roughly 20 percent of your daily water intake can come from solid foods so plan appropriately. For example, cucumbers are 96 percent water, iceberg lettuce is 95 percent water, and strawberries are 92 percent water. In hot weather, avoid foods with a lot of protein and fat since they require more water to digest.

Wrap Up

Failing to drink enough water while behind the wheel can be the equivalent of being legally impaired and sometimes worse. If you are suffering from severe dehydration, this is a true emergency and you are urged to seek medical care as soon as possible. But keep in mind that dehydration is preventable and the solution is usually as simple as drinking water. Stay safe and load up. Remember: *Show what you know – drink your H₂O.*

If you need any ideas on how to prepare and present this information to your drivers, please call me at 847-894-0042 or email me at pgratz548@comcast.net.

This article is a part of TowSafe, a program designed for towers. For more information contact April at 407-706-6796.