

# Vehicle Accidents No. 1 Cause of Workers' Compensation Fatalities

On behalf of Johnston, Moore & Thompson

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Across the U.S., car and truck accidents are the leading cause of fatal accidents on the job. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 2,053 fatal work-related transportation accidents in 2008, which accounted for 40 percent of all workplace fatalities. 1,149 of those fatal work accidents were highway fatalities.

Just as with drivers generally, a growing cause of work-related motor vehicle accidents is distracted driving. As we reported in our [July 29 post](#), workers' compensation insurers have been actively involved in campaigns to prohibit texting and cell phone use while driving.

At least 27 states and numerous municipalities, including Huntsville, have made texting while driving a primary traffic offense, and many also limit cell phone use while driving. Those laws are a positive step, but more can certainly be done.

The first step employers can take to reduce work-related car and truck accidents -- and limit their exposure to [workers' compensation](#) claims -- is simply to put a policy in place.

## Employers Need to Step Up to Reduce Work-Related Traffic Accidents

"This is the kind of thing we need in highway safety," says Vernon F. Betkey, Jr., chairman of the Governors Highway Safety Association, "to let our motoring public know that this is not just something we're running around writing tickets for; it has actually reached the big boys up in Washington."

The next step is to work with professional drivers and their employers to cut down on driver distraction on the job.

"Our association thinks they're a huge piece of this puzzle," Betkey said in an interview with Occupational Health & Safety magazine. "[Y]ou can reach so many people through the employer, and employers have such a vested interest in the health and welfare of their employees."

Many employers are taking the cue. Betkey cited the policy implemented by KCI Technologies Inc. of Sparks, Maryland, as a solid example. Its policy covers any vehicle owned, leased or rented by the company and used by any employee, including temporary workers. It states:

"Employees avoid using a cell phone or other electronic devices while driving. Incoming calls received while driving are allowed to go to voicemail. The vehicle is safely pulled off the road

and stopped if it is necessary to use a cell phone. Conversations are suspended during hazardous situations such as bad weather. Employees always stay focused on driving the vehicle in a safe manner."

Furthermore, workers are held personally responsible for the damages if a company car or truck is damaged because they were talking or texting while driving.

KCI backs up its policy by aggressively screening employees' driving records at the time of hiring and periodically thereafter.

"We've found people with suspended licenses that were driving our vehicles. Some people with pending DUIs were driving our vehicles," says KCI chairman and CEO Terry Neimeyer.

"The economic impact to an employer is not only on the job, it's off the job," says Betkey. "It should be very attractive for an employer to at least have a policy telling employees what steps to take."

Related Resource:

["Near-Term Solutions for Distracted Driving"](#) (Occupational Health & Safety magazine, March 3, 2010)