Office of Health, Safety and Security
Just-in-Time Report

2010-01

Distracted Driving: Become Familiar with the Vehicle Before Driving

July 2010

Important Point

The **number one** DOE activity that results in fatalities is something that everyone does each day – Driving! From 1999 through 2009, there were 13 motor vehicle-related deaths out of 26 total DOE fatalities. More recently, from 2008 through 2009, there were 4 DOE motor vehicle-related fatalities. DOE has many different makes and models of motor vehicles that are driven by employees in the daily performance of work. Evidence exists that drivers may not be sufficiently familiar with the operating controls and other features of a vehicle before they adjust them while driving. Being distracted (searching for unfamiliar vehicle controls) while operating a motor vehicle is the surest way to have an accident. Many long-term university research projects have consistently demonstrated that distracted driving affects reaction times in a manner that is very similar to driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Events

Site/Facility: Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

Reference: NA--LSO-LLNL-LLNL-2009-0028

A lab worker was fatally injured in a vehicle accident while attempting to back a LLNL pickup truck out of a parking space without fastening his seatbelt. Investigators surmised that the worker put the truck in reverse gear and then realized the emergency brake was set. The worker either opened the driver's side door because he could not locate the emergency brake release or there was a blind spot and he opened the door to look backward. While backing, the open door struck another vehicle and the worker accidentally hit the gas pedal instead of the brake causing the truck to accelerate. The driver was ejected from the cab onto the pavement and struck a parked motorcycle.

Important Points:	• **The driver was not wearing a seatbelt and the driver's side door was open.** • **The driver was unfamiliar with the location of the parking brake release.**
Contributor:	• **The parking brake release was located at the bottom of the dashboard and the release lever was molded to fit flush with the dashboard, making it difficult to locate.**

Site/Facility: Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory

Reference: NA--LSO-LLNL-LLNL-2010-0009

An employee was attempting to back up a government pickup truck and realized that the vehicle wasn't moving because the parking brake was set. The employee could not find the brake release while in the seated position. The employee unfastened their seatbelt and exited the vehicle with the engine running and the transmission in reverse gear. With the door open, the employee leaned into the vehicle, locating and releasing the brake. Because the transmission was in reverse, the vehicle started rolling backwards. The employee quickly reset the parking brake with their hand.

Important Points:	• **The driver could not find the parking brake release because the release is molded flush within the dashboard.** • **The driver exited the vehicle with the engine running and the transmission in reverse.**
Contributor:	• **The vehicle was a Chevrolet Tahoe and the interior dashboard configuration was similar to the 2008 Chevrolet Silverado involved in the first event.**

Site/Facility: Y12 National Security Complex

Reference: NA--YSO-BWXT-Y12SITE-2010-0005

A driver of a pick-up truck exited the vehicle to apply de-icer to the back window, and his left foot slipped on the icy pavement. The truck engine was running and the transmission was in Park but the parking brake was not engaged at the time. While trying to keep from falling, the driver flailed both hands and his right foot/leg got caught in the truck as he fell. The truck began rolling backwards and traveled approximately 60 feet while the driver yelled for help, clinging to the door while being dragged on his side and back across the ground. Another employee heard the driver's cries for help, ran to the moving truck, entered it, and applied the brake.

Important Points:	• **The driver exited the vehicle without first applying the parking brake.**
Contributor:	• **The vehicle was an older model truck which allowed the gear to be shifted without requiring the brake pedal to be pressed simultaneously.**

Important Considerations (Prevent Events)

Managers or Supervisors:

- ❑ Develop a short one-page checklist identifying the location of the vehicle controls.
- ❑ If a checklist is not available, use the Navy motor vehicle safety checklist residing on our HSS vehicle safety wiki (http://vsa.doe-hss.wikispaces.net/External+Partnership)
- ❑ Attach parking brake stickers above the brake release to help a driver identify its location.
- ❑ Attach caution stickers on the dashboard of vehicles that do not have brake/gear shift interlocks.
- ❑ Discuss safe driving practices with your workers and reinforce the use of seatbelts.

Drivers:

- ❑ Ensure that you fully familiarize yourself with the following:
  - Parking brake pedal/lever and release
  - Emergency flasher switch
  - Headlight switch (it could be on the turn signal stalk)
  - Windshield wiper and heater/air conditioning controls
  - Power window controls (they could be on the center console)
- ❑ Always wear a seatbelt. Never leave the vehicle unattended with the engine running. If you must exit the vehicle, ensure the transmission is not in gear and the parking brake is engaged. Remember: The parking brake should be set before unbuckling the seatbelt and the seatbelt should be buckled before releasing the parking brake.
- ❑ Perform a walk around the vehicle to check for unsafe conditions (e.g., condition of the tires, condition of headlights and taillights, and leaking fluids) before starting the vehicle.
- ❑ Properly adjust the position of the seat, mirrors, and steering wheel to a comfortable and safe driving position.
- ❑ Do not use hand-held devices or engage in other activities that will distract your driving.
- ❑ Report any problems regarding the safe operation of the vehicle.