

NEW DRIVERS
STAYING FOCUSED ON THE ROAD

ERNIE BERTOTHY: Welcome to DMV Infocast, an audio production of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. This is Ernie Bertothy, Infocast Editor.

With us today is **Beth Kranz**, manager of the DMV Branch Office in Danbury. Beth is with us today to talk about how to avoid being distracted when driving, and ultimately, staying focused on the road.

ERNIE BERTOTHY: Well, Beth, thank you very much for joining us today.

BETH KRANZ: Oh, my pleasure, Ernie.

ERNIE: And today we're going to be talking about staying focused on the roadway.

And Beth, undoubtedly when you're driving through cities and towns, you're going to come across various types of people that may be on the side of the road that are distracted themselves and you should be on lookout for people like this. Can you give an example of some people that you may want to watch out for when you're driving, because they probably aren't aware of what's going on around them because they're in their own world, so to speak?

BETH: Yeah. The first thing that comes to mind to me is children darting out into the road after, you know, balls. They're out playing.

ERNIE: Yup.

BETH: Construction workers, because they're busy, they're not paying attention to the drivers. Delivery people, they're making their deliveries so, you know, they're focused on their job. A lot of times, you know, drivers are not paying

attention to their driving. I've seen people putting makeup on as they're driving. I've seen people reading a newspaper while they're driving.

ERNIE: Yeah.

BETH: And talking on their cell phones while driving is a big distraction.

ERNIE: Right. So it really is paramount that you stay focused, not only on the road, but also be aware of what's going on around you.

BETH: Exactly.

ERNIE: There are also people that may be distracted on the road when you're driving. Beth, can you talk about some examples of people that might be? You kind of already mentioned one of them.

BETH: People, you know, they're talking on their cell phones. They're not really paying attention to what's going on around them. And again, the construction workers. But like parents driving with children a lot of times they're distracted because maybe the child is, you know, upset or needs something, and the parent may turn their head to give the child what they need. Again, you know, I've seen people, you know, reading the paper while they're driving a car. And putting on makeup, and that's really -- they need to stay focused on driving.

ERNIE: Right. One thing that certainly impacts you as a driver, Beth, would be fatigue. Can you talk about the impact that fatigue has on driving and how it could really distract people?

BETH: Well, yes. I mean first of all, if you're really, really tired, you're not as alert as you would be if you were not tired.

ERNIE: Right.

BETH: And you're not able to make snap decisions as to, you know, if somebody is turning towards you to swerve away as quickly as you could have if you

weren't so tired. It also, you know, you don't see as well, you know, especially at night when you're exhausted and there's glare, you know, from lights.

ERNIE: And things like that really come into play, Beth, when you're going on a long trip.

BETH: Exactly.

ERNIE: Can you just talk about some of the precautions? Or do you have any advice to offer drivers who may be about to embark on a long trip, and what they should do to kind of have the energy to do that?

BETH: Absolutely. My first advice is that you get -- you're well rested before you even start your trip, and that you allow yourself plenty of time for your trip. I suggest stopping every couple of hours along the way just to get out and stretch and get a breath of fresh air. Don't eat a heavy meal because a lot of times when people eat a large meal, you get tired after that.

ERNIE: Right.

BETH: And you just want to take a nap.

ERNIE: Right.

BETH: I do suggest that, you know, if you're going to have beverages on the ride that you have coffee or tea. You know, some caffeine, soda or juice, but that taking frequent stops, and maybe if you have another driver that you could share the load and switch off, you know, every couple of hours.

ERNIE: Right.

BETH: So that when you stop and take your break, you switch drivers. And that will help.

ERNIE: Now, another thing that could impact drivers and their judgments are drugs, and I'm not just talking about illegal drugs, but also prescription drugs. And

certainly that could have an impact on a driver if you're not careful, isn't that true?

BETH: Absolutely. Absolutely. Actually, I can give you a for instance. My father, several weeks ago, he lives down in Florida, he was out putting his garbage out, at night, on the curb. And out of the corner of his eye he saw like a flash, and he heard something and he jumped out of the way. And there was a gentleman that drove over his lawn and drove right over the garbage. And my father, you know, if he had not seen it out of the corner of his eye, would have probably been hurt or killed even. And what ended up happening is the gentleman was taking prescription drugs for his back, painkillers, and he just lost control of the vehicle.

ERNIE: And so certainly people who are taking prescription drugs should realize the side effects before they get into a car.

BETH: Yeah. They need to read the side effects that are given on the label. But even over-the-counter anti-histamines can cause you drowsiness. So you really need to read the labels and the warnings on your medications before you get into the car.

ERNIE: Right. And this kind of -- your point kind of piggy-backs onto my next question. If there's someone who is not feeling well, is under the weather and may be sick or is just flat out hurt, such as a back problem or say a stiff neck, they probably should consider getting a ride or putting off the trip, shouldn't they?

BETH: Absolutely. Well, if you have a stiff neck, I mean, you can't turn to see if you have oncoming traffic.

ERNIE: Right.

BETH: You know, if you're sick, I mean how many times when you have a cold do you sneeze? A lot of people close their eyes when they sneeze, and if you're, you know, on the highway doing 65 miles an hour, a sneeze, you could easily, you know, hurt yourself or somebody else.

ERNIE: Right. Right. Now, we have another podcast in our new drivers series about road rage and aggressive driving, which kind of leads to my next question. How can emotions affect driving? And what are some tips you can offer to drivers about how they can control their emotions before getting behind the wheel?

BETH: Well, emotions do have a large impact. I mean if you get into your vehicle and you're angry and somebody cuts you off, you're more likely to try and retaliate. And that, you know, you're in a moving vehicle. So what you need to do is maybe step away from driving for a little while until you can calm yourself down. But even if you're upset, you know, you've been crying, you really don't want to be in the vehicle at that point. You know, if you do have to drive somewhere, turn the radio on. Sing along to the music. You know, open the window. Try and focus your attention to the road and not on your specific problem because it really does have an impact on your driving.

ERNIE: And if you can't do that, you should probably consider putting off the driving?

BETH: Absolutely. Absolutely.

ERNIE: Well, Beth, we covered a lot of ground today talking about how you can stay focused on the road and I thank you very much for joining us.

BETH: You're welcome, Ernie.

ERNIE BERTOTHY: I'm Ernie Bertothy, Infocast Editor. And you've been listening to an Infocast produced by the State of Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles.