Environment aware:

Rural intersections

Use this guide to help lead a discussion with employees to raise awareness about the hazards associated with rural intersections. Empower them with strategies to minimize risks and become safer drivers. Use the form on Page 2 to record meeting details.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), about 41% of traffic fatalities occur in rural areas, even though these areas account for only around 30% of vehicle miles traveled and are home to about 20% of the U.S. population.

Rural intersections pose a particular danger, with roughly one in five roadway fatalities occurring at intersections overall. Among rural intersection crashes, more than 80% occur at unsignalized intersections, such as those without traffic signals or with limited traffic control.

Here are key factors contributing to the risks at these junctions:

1. **Limited visibility and sight distance:** Rural intersections often suffer from obstructed sight lines due to natural features such as trees, cornfields, buildings, and dust. These elements can significantly impede a driver's view of oncoming vehicles. To mitigate this risk, it is imperative to encourage drivers to thoroughly check and recheck before entering an intersection. Identifying blind spots helps anticipate potential hazards.
2. **Skewed geometry:** Unlike the perpendicular angles commonly found on major highways or city streets, some rural intersections exhibit irregular angles or skewed alignments. These challenging angles may require drivers to turn their bodies, not just their heads, to determine right-of-way. Awareness of these geometric variations is crucial for safe navigation.
3. **Lack of lighting:** Rural intersections often suffer from inadequate lighting, especially during nighttime hours. Reduced visibility due to insufficient lighting significantly increases the risk of collisions. This effect is especially noticeable during the transitions of dawn and dusk.
4. **Road surface conditions:** Rural roads may feature uneven surfaces, potholes, or gravel wash-boarding. Gravel roadways tend to be narrower and lack lane markings. Additionally, multiple vehicles traveling on gravel roads can create dust clouds, further compromising visibility. Drivers should be aware of these specific hazards and adapt their driving behavior to these challenging road conditions.
5. **Lack of signage:** Signage at rural intersections may be nonexistent or poorly maintained. Uncontrolled intersections are common on gravel roads. In such scenarios, drivers should exercise caution, reduce speed, and be prepared to yield to oncoming traffic. Remember: Vehicles on the left should yield to those on the right.

Have your drivers identify their most dangerous intersections and how they plan to overcome potential problems and navigate safely.

For additional information related to driver safety, visit Nationwide.com/DriveThe5

For further guidance, refer to NHTSA Rural/Urban Comparison of Motor Vehicle Traffc Fatalities: 2023 Data (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/813728)

For assistance with risk management services or safety resources, contact us at RMSolutions@nationwide.com or 1-800-260-1356.

Nationwide.com/AgribusinessRiskManagement

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Toolbox Talk

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Environment aware: Rural intersections

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Discussion notes: