



OCCUPATIONAL DRIVING AND EYESIGHT TESTS

With company car drivers having 50% more road traffic accidents (RTAs) than those driving for domestic purposes¹, driving is one of the most dangerous things we can do at work. It is therefore worrying that road safety charity Brake estimates that at least one in six UK drivers would fail an eyesight test.

Where a business employs people to drive as part of their work, whether company vehicle or their own used for business purposes (but not the daily commute) the employer has a clear 'Duty of Care' to ensure that employees are safe to drive and that they meet the strict requirements of the Highway Code, relevant road traffic laws and the general requirements of the Health and Safety Act 1974. Part of this is seeking to ensure that drivers are medically fit to drive.

The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) guidance document INDG 382 - Driving at Work is clear that it is the employer's responsibility to ensure, as far as is practical, the health and safety of all employees while driving for work. They must also ensure that there is no risk to the public from the company's work-related activities.

HSE suggests that proper occupational driving risk assessments should include reminding all occupational drivers that they must be able to satisfy requirements relating to eyesight as set out in the Highway Code, although it should be noted that the employer is not legally obliged to pay for eyesight tests for drivers.

In order to meet the requirements of the Highway Code occupational drivers should regularly undergo a full eye examination carried out by a qualified optometrist. If the optician states that eyesight correction is necessary for safe driving then it is vital that the prescribed eyewear is always worn when the employee is driving in line with their working responsibilities.

The DVLA recently considered amending the minimum medical standards for eyesight and epilepsy in relation to driving². The consultation concluded that there will be no additional requirement for routine eyesight checks and no requirement for a professional opinion when applying for a licence other than that already in place i.e. the existing number plate test.

However recent changes in DVLA policy mean that anyone failing the standard Police roadside check of reading a car number plate from 20 metres away can have their licence revoked by the DVLA within a matter of hours until such time as they can demonstrate that their eyesight meets the required standard. Previously the Police had to fax the details to the DVLA, often resulting in waits of up to four days before the revocation came into effect. The new system allows this to happen within a matter of hours.

Nevertheless it is important that when developing and implementing occupational road risk policies and risk assessments employers include a requirement for workers to undergo regular eyesight tests; both as a proactive measure to help prevent RTAs and to provide defence if the business's handling of occupational drivers is called into question following an RTA.

¹ According to research carried out by the Transport Research Laboratory www.trl.co.uk/about_trl

² www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/pressoffice/pressreleases/30052012.aspx