Diminished Driving
Recognition and Screening of Older Drivers
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We would like to recognize and thank our partners who contributed to the development of this training program.
• Understand how age-related changes in health and functional status impair driving ability

• Recognize that these changes in driving ability increase crash risk

• Understand approaches to identifying impairment in drivers

• Understand enforcement actions for documenting suspected impairment

Disclaimer:
Though most of the examples in this program show mature drivers the same issues can be experienced by younger drivers.
THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM
The U.S population is aging

• By 2020, America will have 50 million citizens 65 and older.

• By 2020, eight states will double their 65 and older population and nineteen states will have one million or more older citizens.

• California and Florida will rank first and second in the older citizen population by 2025.
Drivers are aging as well

- People are electing to drive longer.
- In 2012, there were almost 36 million licensed drivers ages 65 and older in the United States, which was a 34 percent increase from 1999.
- By the year 2030, 70 million Americans in the U.S. will be over age 65 – and 85 to 90 percent of them will be licensed to drive.
- The risk of being involved in MVC increases with age
  - Per mile traveled, fatal crash rates increase beginning at age 75 and rise sharply after age 80
  - In 2012 5,560 people 65+ were killed and 214,000 injured in motor vehicle traffic crashes
    - This represents an average of 586 older adults injured and 15 killed EVERY DAY
- Fatality rate of older drivers is 17 times higher than those of 25 to 64-year-olds.
Older drivers are less likely to be involved in crashes
• Related to alcohol use
• Involving high speeds
• Occurring at night

Older drivers are more likely to be involved in crashes
• at intersections (usually in the vehicle that is struck)
• in which the front of one vehicle hits the side of another vehicle
• Involving merging
  • Particularly when the other vehicle is traveling faster or is in the older driver’s blind spot
HOW AGING AFFECTS THE BODY AND MIND
Sensory:

- **Vision**: ability to see clearly and focus in various levels of light as well as to monitor movement on 3 sides
- **Hearing**: ability to hear and distinguish sounds as well as judge their proximity

Cognitive:

- **Attention**: ability to pay close attention to other cars, traffic signs and signals, and pedestrians
- **Reaction and Planning**: ability to react quickly to events and make appropriate adjustments
- **Judgement**: accurate judgement of distance and speeds
Physical:
- Neck range of motion: ability to turn neck from side to side
- Arm and leg strength: ability control steering wheel and pedals

Lifestyle Changes:
- Driving patterns change: location and timing of driving is different after retirement
- Older drivers tend to drive fewer miles and they often favor local roads over highways.
Sensory
- Vision changes: low vision, cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration
- Inability to safely read signs, anticipate road changes

Cognitive
- Dementia can lead to inability to follow directions, lack of attention, lack of visuospatial abilities, inability to handle multiple inputs, slowed reaction time

Physical
- Movement disorders: Parkinsons, stroke, nerve injury, severe arthritis

Medications
- Medications for many common conditions- heart disease, diabetes, pain, sleep, depression- can cause motor slowing, poor focus, somnolence
- More than 75% of drivers age 65 + report using one or more medications
Street scene viewed without a cataract

Street scene as if viewed through a cataract
Macular degeneration

Glaucoma
Vehicle design:

• Non-adjustable seats
• Complex dash designs/ lots of lights
• Difficult to reach seatbelt
• Heavy doors (SUVs)/large motor vehicles
• Blindspots

• Road barriers:
  • Narrow roads
  • Damaged signage
  • Illegible traffic control devices
HOW TO RECOGNIZE POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN THE OLDER DRIVER
• Inadequate scanning of roadways
• Difficulty staying in same lane
• Difficulty making left turns and selecting correct lane when turning
• Inappropriate or delayed stopping
• Pedal misapplication
• Failure to yield or respond appropriately to road signs or signals
Clues that driver may have cognitive impairment

Orientation:
- Confusion regarding the time of day, day of week, month, year
- Not knowing point of departure or destination

Language:
- Difficulty communicating
- Stumble over works. Word finding difficulties
- Rambling, tangential speech, “word-salad”

Attention:
- Asking the same question or providing the same information repeatedly
- Difficulty following simple directions/sequencing
Clues that driver may have cognitive impairment

Appearance:
- Disheveled appearance/poor personal hygiene
- Mismatched clothing
- Clothing is inappropriate for season/weather conditions
- ID bracelet indicating medical condition that could impact driving ability

Motor function:
- Difficulty with manual dexterity—removing driver license from purse
- Difficulty ambulating, lack of coordination, shaking/tremor
• When surveyed, older people identify independence and autonomy as their most important values.

• Driving is the epitome of both. Some view their driving privileges and their motor vehicle as the last vestige of independence.

• Giving up one’s license can feel like giving up one’s independence.

• Public transportation can be problematic for the older adult.
  • Limited mobility
  • Confusion with schedules/transfers
  • Financial constraints
Diminished Driving Skills

Law Enforcement’s Role

Safe Drivers · Safe Vehicles · Secure Identities · Saving Lives
• NHTSA’s Older Driver Program 5 Year Strategic Plan 2012-2017:
  • Addresses the “need for law enforcement to have more training and information to help them **better assess warning signs and understand what next steps to take** and what actions are mandated by laws within their jurisdiction.”

• Vermont’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan:
  • “Older driver crashes currently account for 27% of all fatal crashes in Vermont. Due to the projected **significant increase in this age group** in coming years, it is **important to be proactive at addressing potential safety countermeasures for this population.**“
Interdisciplinary Approach

- Community
- Law Enforcement
- Health Professionals
- DMV

Safe Drivers · Safe Vehicles · Secure Identities · Saving Lives
Importance of Driving

- Mobility
- Freedom
- Independence
- Self reliance
- Self expression
- Necessity
True or False:
Law enforcement often shows leniency towards older drivers?

True

Officers often fail to take appropriate action or document encounters with older drivers.
80 years old
5 feet tall and 80 pounds
Chemotherapy for bone cancer
Taking Asthma and Pain Medications
Other than law enforcement, who could have intervened?
Visual inspection of the vehicle, both interior and exterior

- Look for scrapes and scratches
- Notes/reminders to the driver
- Adaptive equipment added to the vehicle
Please Note

The following video scenario is intended to provide the participant with an opportunity to observe signs and symptoms of cognitive impairment.

Due to the limitations and requirements for filming this scenario, it is **not** intended to demonstrate officer safety techniques or tactics. Please refer to your own agency or department policies and procedures for conducting safe traffic stops.
• Weaving from side to side five times in one block and onto the center lane
• Driving through a stop sign
• Slow to respond to my knocking on his window
• Quite forgetful in the conversation; asked twice why I pulled him over and denied both times that he had seen a stop sign or did anything wrong
• Unable to correctly state the date, day of the week or his current address
1) What is your home address?
2) What state are you in?
3) What city are you in?
4) Without looking at your watch What is the current time?
5) What day of the week is it?
6) What is today’s date?
RULE OUT

• Intoxication

• Medications that could impair thinking

• Driver distress due to urgent medical condition
• Attempt to convince Mr. Greene from operating.

• Issue VCVC’s if appropriate

• Request re-exam through VT DMV

• Always follow department policy
• Driving Observation’s
  • Mr. Greene abilities to remain in his lane, drive in a straight without weaving and stop at stop signs raises the question if Mr. Greene is having difficulty maintaining control of the vehicle because of a physical and/or mental reduction in skills

• Cognitive Skills
  • Mr. Greene’s inability to answer question dealing with time and place accurately lead to a question about cognitive skill reduction.
• Relay concern for the driver’s safety and the safety of other motorists

• A re-exam does **not** automatically mean a loss of driving privilege, the DMV has a system in place to evaluate skills and determine driving fitness
Re-Exam requests
What is needed?
Whenever the Commissioner has good cause to believe that any holder of an operator’s license, or any applicant for renewal of an operator’s license, is incompetent or otherwise not qualified to be licensed, he or she may require such person to submit to a special examination to determine his or her capabilities or mental or physical fitness, but no person shall be required to pay to the State a fee for such special examination. Such examination shall be given at such time and place as the Commissioner may determine. If the Commissioner determines that a special examination is warranted, then a driving examination shall be administered. If, under the Commissioner’s discretion, extenuating circumstances exist, the Commissioner may also administer a written or oral examination. (b) Upon the conclusion of such examination, the Commissioner shall take action as may be appropriate and may suspend or revoke the license or right of such person to operate a motor vehicle or may issue a license subject to restrictions as permitted under section 612 of this title.
• Written history; tracking this history determines developing patterns of unsafe driving

• Important to:
  • Law enforcement
  • DMV
  • Driver’s family- contact with law enforcement is often a call to action for family intervention
  • Physician and others working to keep the individual safe
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DMV wants to know about drivers with these conditions when there’s a nexus to driving

- Functional Impairments
- Diabetes
- Lapses of Consciousness, including Dementia
- Severe Visual Impairments
VSP DMV Re-EXAM Request Form

Check the drivers record
Submit a complete re-exam referral form to DMV
Include a report and any supporting documentation.

**Age should never be a factor in deciding to request a re-exam**

VCVC is not required to request a re-exam
• Driver does not create an immediate traffic safety threat

• **Reported**, second or third hand physical incapacitation, confusion or disorientation (not observed)

• Used to address an issue of negligence/road rage
Priority Request for Re-Exam

• Must be filed by LEO

• Must be witnessed by LEO

• Driver must pose an imminent threat to their safety or the safety of the public.

• Must be hand delivered to DMV
What is the driver’s:

• Desired scope of driving
• Current driving knowledge and skills
• Primary driving environment (rural/urban & time of day)
• Sense of responsibility toward safety
• Understanding of their condition, restrictions, and overall compliance with treatment
Potential Outcomes

- No action taken
- Restriction
- Monitoring
- Suspension
- Revocation
SECTION 5
• Smart Drivers

• We Need to Talk

• Car Fit

www.aarp.org
• Mature Operator’s Program
• Online Mature Operator’s Course
• Roadwise Review
• “Smart Features for Mature Drivers” Guide

Ww1.northernnewengland.aaa.com
Driver Rehabilitation

- UVM Medical Center
- White River Junction
- Rutland (2016)

- Must be referred by attending physician
• Provides support for patients and families
• Provides education on interacting with someone living with Alzheimer’s/Dementia
• Dementia & Driving Resource Center
• On-Line Training for Law Enforcement

Alz.org
Age should not play a role in your decision to request a Re-Exam

Ask yourself; If this person was 20, 40 or 60 years old would I be requesting DMV do a Re-Exam. If the answer is yes submit the request if the answer is no it is based on age not behavior.
For More Information

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