**Older/Aging Driver Talking Points**

**Key Messages**

1. **Older drivers are generally safe drivers.**

* Drivers 65 and older made up 20 percent of all licensed drivers in 2019, but they were involved in only 16 percent of all crashes.
* From 2015-2019, only 11 percent of elderly drivers killed were known to be drinking. For drivers 21 – 34-years-old in the same time frame, it was 45 percent.
* Aging motor vehicle drivers 65 and older wear their seat belts more often than younger drivers. Drivers in that age group who died in crashes buckled up 71 percent of the time (2015 – 2019). Among drivers aged 21-34 who were killed, only 47 percent were wearing a seat belt.

1. **Older drivers do face challenges.**

* Senior citizens are more likely to get killed or injured because they are medically fragile and less able to recover from injuries. In fact, about one out of every four traffic fatalities in Minnesota is a person 65 or older.
* Intersections can cause an elderly driver trouble, especially when gauging the speed of traffic on the lanes they will cross.
* We all age differently. By the age of 85 nearly all of us will see significant changes in our vision and physical abilities.
* More than 80 percent of senior citizen-involved crashes occur between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Their crash involvement is largely a daylight occurrence.

1. **Concerns for aging drivers**

* A person who is concerned about their parents driving can write a letter to DVS.
  + DVS will call the person in for an interview
  + DVS can request the person to do a written and road test, submit a vision report, or a doctor’s statement verifying that they are physically qualified to drive within 30 days of the interview.
  + If the person doesn’t submit the requested statements, is unable to pass required tests or their vision/physical report is unsatisfactory, their license can be revoked.
* Law enforcement can also contact DVS to review a person’s license if the person was stopped for reasons such as being lost, involved in a crash or if law enforcement witnessed their driving and felt that they should either retest or get a doctor’s written approval to drive.
* Talk to your parents’ physician to discuss their ability to drive.
  + The doctor and optometrist can require the driver to be issued limitations such as speed, time of day driving or certain restrictions to driving specific types of roads.

**How to monitor older drivers’ driving**

* New scratches or dents on vehicles or garages.
* Stopped by an officer (whether or not received a ticket).
* Reference to other drivers honking or making gestures.

**Ride along with older driver and check if they:**

* Frequently check mirrors and look ahead to identify dangers.
* Navigate turns (especially left hand turns) without undo risks or waits.
* Keep within their lane lines.
* Don’t get lost in familiar areas.
* Drive at reasonable speeds.

**Additional Information**

While elderly drivers, as a general rule, are safer drivers, declining vision and physical abilities can put aging drivers at risk.

Adaptive equipment such as knobs to make turning easier and hand controls for gas and brakes can keep elderly drivers safe on the road. In addition, small things like setting mirrors correctly, and adjusting the driver’s seat position can be extremely helpful.

Many drivers self-regulate as they age. They often refuse to drive at night because of their vision, avoid interstates, or only drive to places with which they are very familiar.

Some occupational therapists have special expertise in evaluating driving capabilities and assisting people to return to driving, when appropriate, after an illness such as a stroke.

It is very important for people to pay attention to their parents’ driving and help start the discussion of when to stop driving, and determine other travel options.

However, we must all be sensitive to aging drivers who can no longer get behind the wheel. Older drivers forced to stop driving will feel a real lack of freedom and often suffer from depression as a result.

Ultimately, communities need to understand this emerging issue and make plans for safe travel options for the elderly and make these options easily accessible.