

Roadside eye tests – how good is your eyesight?

Ensuring eyesight is good enough for driving is not down to the individual alone. Under health and safety laws, the employer has a responsibility to ensure that employees are fit to drive and that your drivers have adequate vision.

As an employer, you have legal obligations to any employees who drive whilst at work – that's not news. However, there are areas that you should focus on to protect yourself from prosecution and ensure that your own insurance is not prejudiced.

Eyesight tests have been a hot topic for some time, accidents involving a driver with poor vision are estimated to cause almost 3,000 casualties and cost £33 million in the UK per year¹. And with an estimated 9 million drivers on Britain's roads with vision that falls below legal standards², an average of 7,000 people a year lose their licence due to failing eyesight³.

The ability to see clearly is crucial for driving safely. Given that our eyesight can deteriorate as we age, and with more people working into their sixties and beyond, it's likely to be a growing problem for businesses with company vehicles.

While all drivers are required to pass a simple eyesight check during their test, without any future assessments, there are no plans to change the current regulation, despite a staggering 70% of UK adults (approximately 29 million drivers) admitting that their eyesight has worsened since they passed. The figure is naturally greatest amongst over 55s (84%) but is still worryingly high for younger drivers. Over half of 18-24-year-olds (55%) and 25-34s (59%) confess that their vision has deteriorated⁴.

Don't risk your life or your licence

The police have the power to revoke the licence of any drivers who fail the roadside eye test, which could prove to be a major operational issue for employers who have staff operating company vehicles to deliver their services to their clients. Imagine having even 5 per cent of your operational workforce unable to use your vehicles to provide your services, get to site or move goods.

Legal responsibilities for employers

Under GB guidelines, Driving and riding safely for work, employers must make sure drivers are safe and healthy and have the required physical capabilities – including no sensory impairments – and training to drive safely. The duty of care to employees while driving covers any policies and training focus on safe driving, vehicles and routes. Within this guidance is the requirement to ensure all drivers have regular sight checks.⁵

So what can you do?

As an employer, ensuring anyone who drives on company business has a regular eye test, and that this is recorded. Just providing access is probably not enough - despite 72% of 500 businesses involved in a 2019 research project for Specsavers Corporate Eyecare and YouGov confirming they provide access to eye tests, nearly half (45%) were concerned that their employees who drive for work do not have the necessary eyesight for driving⁶.

It would be reasonable to expect companies to have processes in place to ensure that their vehicles are being operated by employees with eyesight that meets the legal standard, so it's entirely conceivable that company directors or managers maybe held legally liable for an accident caused by an employee's sub-standard vision where there were insufficient checks in place.

For further details please visit www.oamps.co.uk

¹Fit to Drive: a cost benefit analysis of more frequent eyesight testing for UK drivers, Road Safety Observatory, 2021

²National Eye Health Week, Vision Matters in conjunction with West Mercia Police, 2020, <https://www.visionmatters.org.uk/>

³The DVLA, <https://inews.co.uk/essentials/lifestyle/cars/car-news/more-than-7000-motorists-a-year-stripped-of-their-driving-licence-because-they-cant-see-383655>, 2020

⁴70% of UK drivers say their vision has deteriorated since passing their test, Driving.org, 2021

⁵Health and Safety Executive, Driving and riding safely for work, 2021

⁶Specsavers Corporate Eyecare <https://www.specsavers.co.uk/corporate/news-information/small-business-eyecare-benefits-research>