

Fleets should have a clear view when it comes to **driver eyesight**

As many UK road safety organisations call for the law on driver vision to be strengthened **Fleet Manager** takes a look at why it makes sense for all drivers have a sight test every two years to ensure that their eye health is good and help improve road safety

THERE has been quite a lot of publicity recently from road safety organisations that are supporting the idea that drivers should have an eye test every two years to maximise their eye health and reduce the risk of accidents on UK roads. Introducing this kind of policy for people who drive for work would also be a better way for fleet managers to keep a check on their drivers' eye health and potentially reduce accidents.

Highlighted ahead of Brake's Road Safety Week last November was The Association of Optometrists (AOP) 'Don't Swerve a sight test' campaign. The AOP were not only calling for people to make eye tests a regular thing but were recommending having a professional eye test at least every two years, or straight away if a problem arises because eyesight can decay without noticing,

Indeed, both Brake and the AOP are additionally calling for a change in the law which would see motorists prove that their vision meets the legal standard before being granted a licence and then every 10 years to coincide with licence renewal.

Good eyesight is a basic requirement for safe driving. Poor vision increases the risk of collisions due to the driver's inability to recognise and react in time to a hazard or the behaviour of other road users.

However, poor vision is believed to be massively underreported in government crash causation data due to the difficulty in determining if eyesight was to blame. Some casualties are likely to occur because drivers are unaware they have a vision problem and have neither corrected it nor reported it to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). Untreated eye conditions can occur gradually over time. In extreme cases, someone can lose up to 40% of their vision without being aware they have a problem.

Previous research for the RAC Foundation has shown that almost four out of five motorists support the introduction of compulsory eye tests for drivers each decade.

Seventy-nine percent of those questioned in an Ipsos MORI survey for the RAC Foundation say not only do they back the move but they would also be prepared to pay for the tests which would

coincide with the compulsory ten-yearly renewal of driving licences.

The results show support for a regular eye test was high amongst drivers and non-drivers alike. Support did not differ significantly by gender, age group, social status or geographical location, though there was slightly more support amongst women and those aged over 55, and slightly less support amongst those living in London.

But despite this, many drivers do not get their eyes tested regularly or even at all.

In 2011, 5,916 drivers had their licence revoked by the DVLA for failing to meet minimum eyesight standards.

There is evidence people do not get their eyes checked enough. A Brake survey found one in four (25%) UK drivers haven't had a vision test in the past two years, and 4% (the equivalent of more than 1.5 million licence holders) have never had their eyes tested. In a separate study by the College of Optometrists, one in 20 people aged above 40 said they had not been for a sight test for at least 10 years or could not recall when they last went.

people aged 65 and over have some cataract development. Often it is safe to drive with contacts and it is not a legal requirement to inform the DVLA if the driver meets the minimum standards for driving.

AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD): A disease resulting in damage to the retina, causing loss of the centre of your vision. It can occur in one or both eyes. It is often possible to slow down AMD with medical treatment, so it is vital to have frequent eye tests to catch this disease in the early stages. AMD is the most common cause of poor sight in people over 60.

GLAUCOMA: A condition that damages the optic nerve and causes complete blindness if left untreated. The most common form is chronic glaucoma, which develops slowly and painlessly, so the sufferer will not usually notice there is a problem until vision is significantly impaired. It is therefore vital to have frequent eye tests to catch this disease in the

early stages. Acute glaucoma, where the condition comes on suddenly and painfully, leading sufferers to seek immediate treatment, is much less common. Glaucoma causes permanent damage, but if treated early enough, vision loss can be kept to a minimum. Glaucoma is very uncommon in people under 40 but becomes more common with increasing age. Drivers with glaucoma must notify the DVLA and inform them of their condition.

DOUBLE VISION (DIPLOPIA): A variety of underlying causes or conditions can cause a person to see two images of a single object either some or all of the time. It is usually possible to cure this condition with treatments ranging from eye exercises to surgery. Drivers who develop diplopia must not drive and must immediately inform the DVLA.

OTHER HEALTH CONDITIONS: Other conditions and factors can affect eyesight, including: Diabetes, heart disease, migraines, tiredness and some medication and ageing.

For a full list of medical conditions that drivers must report visit the DVLA website at:

www.gov.uk/health-conditions-and-driving



VISION PROBLEMS

Vision problems are common. It has been estimated that almost three quarters (74%) of the UK population either use glasses or contact lenses, or have had laser eye surgery to correct their vision. Long- or short-sightedness are common conditions affecting eyesight in the UK, and can affect anyone at any age. Several health conditions can cause serious and sometimes permanent damage to eyesight. These conditions are more common in people aged over 50, but can affect younger people too. Some of the most common conditions are listed below:

CATARACT: This is when a clouding develops in the lens of the eye. Depending on its severity it can cause glare, short sightedness, double vision, and in severe cases, blindness. Cataracts are very common in older people: more than half of

CURRENT GOVERNMENT STANDARDS OF VISION FOR DRIVING

Drivers must be able to read (with glasses or contact lenses, if necessary) a car number plate made after 1 September 2001 from 20 metres.

Drivers must also meet the minimum eyesight standard for driving by having a visual acuity of at least decimal 0.5 (6/12) measured on the Snellen scale (with glasses or contact lenses, if necessary) using both eyes together or, if you have sight in one eye only, in that eye.

Drivers must also have an adequate field of vision — an optician can inform on this and do a test.

LORRY AND BUS DRIVERS

Drivers must have a visual acuity at least 0.8 (6/7.5) measured on the Snellen scale in your best eye and at least 0.1 (6/60) on the Snellen scale in the other eye. Drivers can reach this standard using glasses with a corrective power not more than (+) 8 dioptres, or with contact lenses. There's no specific limit for the corrective power of contact lenses.

Drivers must have a horizontal visual field of at least 160 degrees, the extension should be at least 70 degrees left and right and 30 degrees up and down. No defects should be present within a radius of the central 30 degrees.

Drivers must tell DVLA if they have any problems with their eyesight.