

BLM Safety, Health, and Emergency Management

August 12, 2010

SAFETY ALERT - SAFETY ALERT - SAFETY ALERT

Issue:

Recently, a BLM driver experienced a vehicle rollover accident and died from the injuries he sustained. He was not wearing a seatbelt at the time of the incident and was ejected from the vehicle. In the past few years, BLM has experienced multiple vehicle accidents in which occupants were not wearing seatbelts. Continuous use of seatbelts provides several benefits:

- Drivers can maintain better control of the vehicle
- Other occupants are not injured by unbelted occupants
- Vehicle protection systems are most effective **when used and** occupants are held in place

All occupants must **use** their seatbelts, and only the number of passengers for which there are operable seatbelts shall ride in the vehicle. Vehicles and heavy equipment with damaged or inoperable seatbelts must be deadlined until repairs are completed.

Road conditions, speed, and driver skill level have been contributing factors in BLM motor vehicle accidents. For unpaved roads, the speed limit is acceptable for optimal road conditions, but it is not appropriate for all driving conditions. We are familiar with advice to slow down for wet or icy road conditions or during reduced visibility. Dry conditions, such as loose gravel, ruts, and “washboard surface” reduce traction and increase braking distance. Steering, acceleration, and braking respond differently on unpaved roads. Vehicles may also respond differently on unpaved roads when the Anti-lock Braking System (ABS) feature is activated. Owner’s Manuals provide warnings and directions on how to control vehicles with higher center of gravity when driving on unpaved roads.

Tire tread wear also contributes to reduced traction and can endanger occupants if tires are worn or not properly inflated. When tires or wheels are replaced on a vehicle, they must meet the standard set by the vehicle manufacturer for compatibility with the vehicle to decrease the risk of loss of control of the vehicle. The Owner’s Manual provides cautions and procedures for tire and wheel replacement. Additional procedures are required if vehicles have automatic tire inflation sensors.

Recommendations:

- Operators and passengers must wear seatbelts at all times while the vehicle is in motion.
- If you need to remove your seatbelt, even if only for a few seconds, pull off the road **and come to a complete stop.**
- Reduce speed on wet roads and when dry road surfaces are loose gravel, sand, or “washboard.”

- Read the warnings in the Owner's Manual to understand how to control the vehicle when road conditions are not optimal. Not all vehicles function alike.
- Discuss local driving conditions, speed, and proper steering techniques during driver training classes, orientations, and during tailgate safety sessions.
- Ensure that Risk Assessments address backcountry driving conditions.
- Implement a buddy system to check driving skills of new employees and mentor them on off-road driving skills.
- Check tread wear prior to using the vehicle and deadline the vehicle if tires show excessive wear. Determine the cause of the excessive wear and replace the tires. Complete further maintenance if the vehicle condition has caused the excessive wear.