



PREVENTING ACCIDENTS IN PARKING LOTS

An estimated 20 percent of vehicle accidents occur in parking lots. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that “pedal application errors” (usually, mistaking the accelerator for the brake) are a leading cause of such accidents, especially by drivers under 20 and over 76 years of age. But there are many other causes, as well. Vehicles strike other vehicles – or pedestrians – because of sudden movements by those other vehicles or pedestrians, excessive speed, poor visibility, driver distractions, or physical limitations that affect the driver’s ability to see what is around the vehicle, or respond quickly to hazards.

In our volunteer insurance program, we have had claims resulting from accidents in parking lots – injuries, and damage to other vehicles, that could have been prevented.

Here are a few tips to help you be sure your volunteer drivers, their passengers, and all those around them stay safe in parking lots:

- Make sure passengers are buckled in, before the vehicle is started. One volunteer driver tried to open the passenger-side door to let the client in, while the engine was running and the transmission was in gear. The driver’s foot slipped off the brake, and the vehicle lurched backward, knocking the client down and breaking her leg.
- Back into a parking space (or pull all the way through to the next space if it is available). There is no activity in a vacant parking space, but plenty of activity in the parking lot aisles. It is much safer to enter those aisles by driving forward, rather than backing up – even with the backup cameras that newer vehicles have. You might need to park farther away from the store in order to be “headed out” of a parking space, but the extra safety is well worth the extra steps. (NOTE: Parking lots usually are least crowded in the early part of the week.)
- Older drivers often have less range of motion in their heads and shoulders, and are less able to see side to side in intersections. The Hartford Center for Mature Market Excellence and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology AgeLab have documented that as little as 15-20 minutes of daily exercise can help preserve the flexibility a safe driver needs. (See **Resources**, below.)
- With so many mobile devices and in-vehicle electronics, it is very easy for drivers to become distracted. Make sure your drivers know that when they are ready to put the vehicle in motion, it’s time to stop adjusting the radio, using the mobile phone or GPS, adjusting the seatbelt...and having conversations.
- Expect the unexpected!

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Resources

VIS Preventer Papers on “Vehicle Backing,” “Defensive Driving,” and “Patience.” Available in the VIS Vault on www.visvolunteers.com (members-only content; log in or click “Join Now.”)

Association For Driver Rehabilitation Specialists – www.aded.net – Occupational therapists with special training in assessing safe-driving skills. This third-party assessment can be well worth the cost, when there is a difference of opinion between the driver and his or her family members, or between the driver and the volunteer supervisor, about the driver’s capabilities.