

## Give Thanks for a Safe Trip

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

This coming week is Thanksgiving week. It's a week of heavy travel that leads into a month of heavy travel as we move from one holiday to another, ending in early January. We've also had a much colder air move into the area, finally, reminding us that we are in the last month of autumn and winter is on the doorstep. Additionally we saw a tragic vehicle accident this week that reminds us that our highways can be convenient, but also dangerous.

This year, I'm hoping to be able to give thanks that all of you were able to travel safely to where you wanted to spend Thanksgiving Day, whether that is a mile away or half a continent away! But it goes beyond simply hoping that you all are safe in your travels, it comes down to each and every one of us taking every step possible to be a safe and responsible driver. It seems like a majority of vehicle accidents come down to distracted driving, impaired driving or excessive speed. All of these come down to irresponsibility by the vehicle operator.

Distracted driving has always been there. Cell phones have simply made it worse and more common. Distractions can come from children in the car, changing a radio station, or even eating a hamburger as you're trying to drive down the road. Engaging in a conversation can draw your attention away from the road and the vehicles around you. Cell phones; well now you can be texting, emailing, talking, video conferencing, just about anything right from your car. One of my complaints about talking on the phone while you're driving has never been about whether you have a hands free device, but rather it's taking your attention away from the road. Just don't allow yourself to be distracted by anything. Period. If you are distracted on a two lane road in rural Kansas and run off the road, that's one thing. But when you are in busy traffic and run a stop sign or stop light, that's something completely different!

Impaired driving comes from something that physically and/or mentally prevents you from acting or reacting in a normal manner. We often think of alcohol and illegal drugs, but it can also come from prescription medications being taken as prescribed or simply being drowsy. The bottom line is just don't do it. New Year's Eve is often thought of as the prime time for impaired driving, but other holidays are just as prone to it as well. If someone thinks that you are too impaired to drive, don't argue! The more you argue the more you prove that they are right. Hand over the keys!

Excessive speed is one that really bothers me. Yes, I almost lost my license from too many speeding tickets when I was in college. I had no choice but to learn to drive the speed limit! People don't plan enough time for trips. They assume they can speed and make up any difference. Driving the speed limit, or slightly below, isn't about avoiding a ticket, it's about staying out of no win situations at high rates of speed. Here's a guideline: if you are traveling any distance on the interstate, figure that you will average 60 mph. If you're on two lane roads, figure on 55. Yes, you will drive faster than that, but after stops for comfort, food and fuel, even driving through small towns, those averages drop drastically. Trust me, I've driven a lot of miles and kept track. Plan plenty of time for the trip, set the cruise, and don't worry. If you arrive early, won't everyone be surprised. This can also go a long ways towards giving you more time to stay out of dangerous situations such as tailgating and rapid lane changes.

We lose far too many people every year because of how people are driving. If you are breaking the law, you are part of the problem. Drive safely, sanely, unimpaired and defensively. Be part of the solution and arrive safe this Thanksgiving holiday!