Holiday Road

Joel Hunt, Central Office

Remember the problems Clark W. Griswold had while driving his “front-wheel drive sleigh” to the country to find the perfect Christmas tree in the 1989 film “Christmas Vacation?” From road rage, to driving under a logging truck, to a near collision with a snowplow, to going airborne and landing in a Christmas tree lot, the hapless Griswold could have been America’s poster child for distracted driving!

In real life, holiday traffic crashes are no laughing matter. Of the six major travel holidays last year: New Year’s, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, there were 13,580 crashes in Ohio, resulting in 5,265 injuries and 75 fatalities. Even worse, many of them were entirely preventable.

“One of the leading causes of crashes, during the holidays or otherwise, is driver behavior issues, such as speed, distractions, and alcohol,” said ODOT Highway Safety Program Manager Michelle May.

All distractions endanger driver,

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Ohio Turnpike development update

David Rose, Central Office

Ohio’s highway system is the lifeline of the state’s economy, but the cost of repairing and expanding its world-class transportation network is far outpacing the available transportation dollars.

“Without new funds, highway projects we thought would start in the next few years could be pushed off for two decades,” said Director Wray. “Ohio can’t let that happen.”

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passenger, and bystander safety. Typically, distractions include texting, using a cell phone or smartphone, eating and drinking, talking to passengers, grooming, using a navigation system, or adjusting the radio.

Because text messaging requires visual, manual, and cognitive attention from the driver, it is by far the most alarming distraction.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, lap and shoulder belts reduce the risk of fatal injury to front-seat passengers by 45 percent and the risk of moderate to serious injuries by 50 percent. In 2008, nearly 14,000 unbuckled passenger vehicle occupants lost their lives on U.S. roadways. Nearly half of them could have been saved if they had used a seat belt. On any given major travel holiday in Ohio, some 1,000 people involved in crashes are not buckled up, and 40 are killed.

So, who isn’t wearing their seat belts? Teens, young adults, men, pickup truck drivers and passengers, nighttime drivers, and drivers in rural areas.

May said ODOT maintains one of the largest safety programs in the country. “We set aside about $72 million annually for engineering improvements at high-crash, severe-crash locations. This funding is available to ODOT District Offices and local governments, and can be used on any public roadway.”

ODOT also sets aside about $10 to $20 million annually for systematic safety investments that can be spread across hundreds of roadway miles for a relatively low cost.

This year, ODOT launched a public outreach effort focusing on Safe Routes to Schools, roadway departure and intersection crashes, and Share the Road initiatives. Roadway departure and intersection crashes make up about 40 to 50 percent of serious injuries and fatalities each year. Share the Road addresses the growing number of motorcycles, bikes and pedestrians sharing Ohio roads. 

### Holiday Road

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holiday</th>
<th>Year 2005</th>
<th>Year 2006</th>
<th>Year 2007</th>
<th>Year 2008</th>
<th>Year 2009</th>
<th>Year 2010</th>
<th>Total Fatalities by Holiday</th>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>3.7</td>
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Based on ODPS Holiday Period. Time frames for each Holiday varies from 1.25 to 4.25 days

**Ohio Turnpike development update**

ODOT must find new, innovative ways to fund construction projects, especially large-scale projects that add capacity and enhance mobility—all vital to growing Ohio’s economy. The solution? Look into the evaluation and development of the Ohio Turnpike, a valuable asset that could help fill the department’s funding gap.

ODOT and the Ohio Office of Budget and Management recently announced that KPMG LLP will evaluate options for leveraging the Ohio Turnpike. KPMG was selected from a list of 14 original applicants. The team will explore all options, from keeping the Turnpike as is, to a potential lease, or even an option the state has not yet considered.
Employee feedback invaluable to district office
Joyce Miller, District 3

In any organization, smart managers believe that good communication and listening to employees is a key part of success. The workforce conversations taking place across the state at ODOT district offices are putting these principles into practice.

These conversations give employees the opportunity to talk with their senior supervisors about their personal contributions to the organization and how they can make ODOT a better place to work.

In District 3, Deputy Director Allen Biehl has been having one-on-one conversations with employees since May. District 3 managers and supervisors have been speaking in depth with their team members and the vast majority of districts are doing the same.

Highway Management Administrator Tim Farley sees real value in these exchanges. He is finding the conversations are the best way to know what is really happening in the county garages.

“It has been a good opportunity to see how the decisions we make at the district affect the workforce at the county level,” he observed.

Planning and Engineering Administrator Ken Wright had a similar reaction.

“Talking to my employees one-on-one has allowed me to get to know them better and has generated some really good ideas,” said Wright. “I’ve already been able to implement some of the changes our employees have suggested.”

ODOT is tracking these conversations and noting any common themes or concerns among employees.

Transportation Engineer Mike Simpkins
Carolyn Kirkland, Central Office

As a transportation engineer in District 4, Mike Simpkins manages consultant projects, reviews the maintenance of traffic plans, and estimates construction costs.

Before his six years of service with the department, Simpkins worked for the consulting firm URS. Even while at the firm he was still involved in the design of ODOT projects.

Simpkins especially enjoys the diversity of the projects. He works on a range of projects, from small ones that connect sanitary outlines, to major undertakings like rebuilding Interstate 90. He says he looks forward to being with the department long enough to watch a major ODOT project from conception to final completion.

In his free time, Simpkins enjoys spending time with his children and says he is thankful for the flexibility of his schedule at ODOT. Whether he is picking his children up from school, taking them to the doctor’s office, or coaching his daughter’s soccer team, Simpkins says the department is very understanding.
Dispatches from the annual meetings

We asked some writers from the district offices to share their impressions of the annual meetings held in 2011. Here’s what we heard.

More than 300 district employees made the journey to the Owens Community College for the gathering. Deputy Director Audet introduced the administrative staff and highlighted district-wide accomplishments, thanking those who had made them possible. Later, employees met with the director and district administrators to discuss and share their thoughts on how to make this already great organization even better. — Theresa Pollick, District 2

Construction engineers presented an overview of several of the district’s high profile projects, including the Jeremiah Morrow bridge replacement, and the design and construction of the state’s first superstreet intersections in Butler County. There were also presentations on several of the district’s future mega projects. It was a day for District 8 to amaze and be amazed by their colleagues. — Sharon Smigelski, District 8

Teamwork and dedicated public service was unquestionably the spirit embodied by District 6 during the annual meeting. Through presentations, employee recognitions and an office home video, the common theme of creating a positive, progressive and individual-thinking workplace was heard and felt by all. — Nancy Burton, District 6

Employees of ODOT are “simply the best,” as intoned in the famous Tina Turner song played as part of District 3’s annual meeting video. Photos of the team hard at work were accompanied by a variety of music, intermixed with video clips of employees talking about ODOT and the meaning of job satisfaction. — Joyce Miller, District 3

It was a day to remember those we’d lost, and a day to welcome to the family a few new members. It was a day to showcase our present in pictures; it was a day to remember our past. It was a day about the employees. — Rhonda Pees, District 1
Dispatches from the annual meetings

Excitement buzzed through the crowd as employees arrived at the meeting. Hellos and handshakes were passed around as employees were able to catch up with one another. After the director’s message, employees left with a renewed sense of pride in their job at ODOT. — Brenna K. Slavens, District 10

Our employees were extremely involved in the meeting, taking time to answer questions throughout the event and staying an hour following the meeting to speak one-on-one with the director. After a lengthy illness, Deputy Director Randy Chevalley made a much-anticipated appearance and told employees he plans to return to the district soon. — Mandi Abner, District 7

A lot of work went into District 4’s annual meeting, including the daunting task of finding a comfortable location for more than 400 individuals. After visiting several locations, we finally found a home for the meeting at the Maranatha Bible Church. It was truly amazing to see our entire workforce in one place. — Justin Chesnic, District 4

Employee recognition was definitely the theme of the gathering. The meeting ended with each of us realizing that our efforts as public servants have significance and can impact thousands of lives every day. — Michelle Croom, District 5

Highway Technician Gary Casteel may have said it best during our video presentation: “The fulfillment of the job is when we’re going down the highway, spreading our salt and plowing, and you look back and see the road open up. You know you saved a lot of lives that day.” — Jackie Schafer, District 12

The recurring theme was the satisfaction received from helping people and from working with great co-workers. — Becky Giague, District 11

When we found out Director Wray was running a bit late due to traffic, the end of the program was moved to the beginning, and we started the ball rolling. Once the director arrived, everything fell right back into place. Lesson for the future: prepare for the unexpected. Be flexible! — Kathleen Fuller, District 9
ODOT District 12 has added some new, younger faces to the workforce through the district’s first partnership with a program aimed at mentoring inner-city students. The Garfield Heights office has opened its doors to Saint Martin de Porres High School in an effort to give students access to real workplace experience and to motivate them to seek careers in transportation.

Saint Martin de Porres’ Corporate Work Study Program is a powerful example of social entrepreneurship, designed to give inner-city students access to some of the brightest, most influential minds in the greater Cleveland region. They also gain valuable experience and confidence in the workplace and develop academic and professional goals. Students skilled in areas such as data entry, filing, copying and similar entry level clerical tasks work one-on-one with employees in job-sharing teams. The program has placed students in more than 125 participating local businesses and government offices.

“We are excited about this new partnership and the benefits it brings to the students,” said District Deputy Director Myron Pakush.

The district’s participation began with Cleveland City Councilman Joe Cimperman, who encouraged Pakush to visit the school. Following that visit, Director Pakush and Business & Human Resources Administrator Kathey Germany began efforts to sponsor the program, working closely with Central Office. ODOT entered into a personal services contract with Saint Martin de Porres High School which began last September and will run to mid-June of 2012.

District 12 has two students, Daniel and Danielle. Daniel aspires to be an engineer, while Danielle wants to study to become a veterinarian. They come to the office once a week, and each day they are given assignments and job-shadowing duties. They’ve met dozens of ODOT employees from a variety of departments. Daniel has recently been spending more time with bridge engineers to help him gain more perspective on his goal.

WKYC-TV reporter Amanda Barren recently stopped by District 12 to see the program in action and interviewed Andy Haupt, an ODOT bridge engineer.

“We can show students things that they can’t learn in a book,” said Haupt. “Real work experience is so valuable.”

Saint Martin de Porres is a four-year college preparatory school. To date, 100 percent of the students participating in the Corporate Work Study Program have been accepted into college. Daniel says he hopes to apply to the University of Toledo’s Engineering program.
December no time to get the blues
Carolyn Kirkland, Central Office

With holiday treats around every corner, changes in weather affecting moods and snow keeping you indoors, December can be a hard month to stay healthy. Don’t fall victim to unhealthy choices.

SAD
Some people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), caused by less daylight in the fall and winter. Don’t brush off that feeling as simply a seasonal funk to tough out on your own. Get plenty of sunlight by opening more blinds and venturing outdoors. Also eat healthy to avoid feeling sluggish, and exercise regularly to relieve stress and anxiety.

WEIGHT GAIN
While the holiday season is a great time to celebrate with family and friends, it can lead to over-eating and weight gain. One easy suggestion: Don’t go to a holiday party with an empty stomach! Eat something before you leave, or drink a glass of water, and you will be less likely to overindulge.

PHYSICAL FITNESS
Cold weather is no excuse for getting out of shape. You can still exercise and stay healthy. Take the stairs and do cardio exercises each time you reach the top, such as pushups, crunches and lunges. Turn your household chores into exercise: Try cleaning the house in record time. Not only will you sweat and burn calories, you’ll also cross something off of your to-do list early. Happy Holidays!
Americans at last
Greg Pore, Central Office

A LOT OF US ARE U.S. citizens by birth. No tests to take, no lessons to learn. But the road to citizenship is not so easy for those born overseas.

Anup Alex, Ali Rahimi, and Phillip Reicher with the Division of Information Technology recently earned their United States citizenship after years of hard work, dedication and plenty of determination. Their preparation for citizenship included studying U.S. history, government, citizen’s rights and duties, and geography. The three are originally from India, Iran, and Canada, respectively.

“The United States is one of the greatest countries in the history of mankind, and I am proud to be a part of it,” said Rahimi.

All three feel very fortunate to be American citizens, with rights that many others can only dream about.

ODOT Director Jerry Wray and DoIT Chief Information Officer Spencer Wood, far left and right respectively, were on hand to congratulate Phillip Reicher, Ali Rahimi, and Anup Alex at a reception held in honor of their new American citizenship.