

Work environment – **Outdoor environment**

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# Remote area driving >

The employer has a responsibility under the [Workplace Health and Safety Act](#) to make the workplace safe and without risk to the health and safety of the worker. The purpose of this information bulletin is to assist employers to develop safe systems of work that will help them to meet the requirements of the Northern Territory legislation.

## Responsibilities

The employer's legal responsibility includes the provision of information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure the risks involved in remote area travel are minimized.

Worker's also have responsibilities in regards to occupational health and safety, in that they must take appropriate care for their own health and safety and for the health and safety of all persons who may be affected by their actions at the workplace. As far as is practical, workers are to follow all reasonable directions given to them by their employer in relation to their health and safety at the workplace which may include driving in remote areas.

## Hazard Identification

There are many hazards to be identified when vehicles become the primary workplace. Many of these hazards present a serious risk to the worker's health or safety while travelling to remote areas. Consultation between the employer and workers can often be the best way to identify these hazards and to find a suitable control measure that minimises the risk to the worker. Most companies/ organisations will have the expertise within their ranks to formulate safe working procedures.

## Vehicle suitability

Things to consider

- Is the vehicle suitable for the route to be travelled?
- Is it capable of safely carrying the required load and / or number of passengers?
- Is it equipped with sufficient spare parts/wheels, first aid kit, water and emergency provisions for the journey?
- Is it equipped with a means of communication in the event of a breakdown?
- Has the vehicle been maintained to a suitable standard that will provide reliability?

A 4 wheel drive (4WD) vehicle should not always be the automatic choice for remote area travelling. While it is suitable where maximum traction or a greater ground clearance is needed, it also has a higher centre of gravity and different handling characteristics to a standard type passenger vehicle.

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## Driver training

Many roads in the outback are unsealed, and surfaces can vary greatly depending on when they were last graded. Dirt roads demand different driving techniques as traction is reduced and braking distances are increased. In general, a conventional vehicle when driven at a reasonable speed will be adequate for most roads.

A 4WD vehicle can give a false sense of security to an inexperienced driver. If a 4WD is to be used, the driver must be trained and have the necessary driving skills to competently drive the vehicle. It must be remembered that even the relatively simple task of changing a wheel on one of these vehicles has its problems. A 16 inch wheel common to most 4WD vehicles weighs approximately 40 kg and the spare wheel is often carried in an unsuitable position for the safe manual handling capabilities of most people.

A range of advanced driving courses for conventional and 4WD vehicles is available Territory wide.

The driver must be familiar with the route or have accurate maps of the area.

Employers are required under Regulation 52 of the [Workplace Health and Safety Regulations](#) to provide and maintain first aid equipment at the workplace. This includes vehicle first aid kits. Drivers should also be trained in first aid.

If the vehicle is fitted with some sort of communication system, the driver must be trained and competent in its use and must be aware of the procedures applicable to its use. Mobile phones, which are common nowadays, have their limitations. Not all areas in the Territory have access to the service.

There must be a plan in place in the event of a breakdown. Communication is the key to any plan. If the vehicle or driver has no on-board means of communication, a responsible person in town must know of the route being taken, the destination and estimated time of arrival. If the driver fails to communicate back to town, the responsible person can raise the alarm and organise a rescue.

## Remote Area Hazards

Consideration should be given to the following points:

### ***Roadtrains***

These are common in the Northern Territory and can be up to three trailers (50 metres) long. They are not confined to the bitumen and will be encountered on dirt roads. Always give them plenty of room and when overtaking, allow at least 1 km of clear road ahead.

Dust on outback roads can obscure a driver's vision. Take great care if overtaking.

### ***Wandering stock and wildlife***

The majority of Northern Territory roads are not fenced. Cattle, horses, kangaroos, donkeys, buffaloes and even camels may be found crossing the roads particularly early in the morning and late in the afternoon. They may also be found standing in the middle of the road at night. Drivers should slow down and treat all animals on the road or roadside with caution. Do not expect animals to automatically move out of the way. Birds may also be a problem especially if they are feeding on the bodies of other animals killed on the road.

### ***Night driving***

Night driving should be avoided if at all possible. However if night driving is necessary, the vehicle should be checked to ensure its lights are adequate. A driver required to travel at night should be reminded to reduce his/her speed so that he/she can stop safely if required to do so in an emergency.

### ***Driver fatigue***

The driver should be reminded that if he/she feels tired or drowsy they should stop driving and have a break. Breaks of 10 minutes or so should be taken every 3 hours in any case. Driver fatigue is one of the most common causes of single vehicle accidents.

### ***Floods***

The driver should be instructed not to attempt to cross flooded bridges or causeways unless they are absolutely sure of the depth of water over the road and know if there are any submerged obstacles or road damage. Drivers should also be aware of the danger that swift flowing water presents. Most flash floods recede within 24 hours. Listen to radio reports in the wet season.

### ***Breakdowns***

In the event of a breakdown, the driver should be instructed to stay with the vehicle and be reminded that a missing vehicle is much easier to find than a missing person. As temperatures in the Territory can be in both extremes, it is important to remind the driver to stay in the shade or under shelter. Employers and drivers should also ensure that prior to departing there is an ample supply of water in the vehicle.

### ***Service and fuel***

Prior to departing drivers must be given information on the availability of fuel and vehicle repair outlets such as opening times, distances, location and credit card facilities.

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