



*Their vehicle drifted across the roadway and crashed head-on into a tree ...*

# Unsafe Choices

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**P**eople may think “it’s not going to happen to me.” But they need to think again. No one is immune; preventable vehicle crashes happen all the time. Automobile crashes do not mean just cuts, bruises, and broken bones. They can mean permanent disfigurement or worse — and they can mean death, as in the recent case of two airmen.

A typical night of fun for the victims was to go to a local bar and play pool. After the bar closed, they would go to a nightclub to further socialize until it closed the next morning. Then they would go to breakfast and return home to sleep.

Not long ago on one particular weekend, one of the airmen went out on a Friday night to play pool and socialize. After sleep-

ing a short time Saturday morning, he went back out with friends the next day and repeated these activities. After 2 days of “fun,” the driver and another airman, traveling as a passenger, were returning home when their vehicle drifted across the roadway and crashed head-on into a tree. Both died.

The driver was found to have a blood alcohol content of .21; the passenger’s BAC was .24. Both readings were more than twice the legal limit. This mishap was not only preventable, it was predictable.

Safety office files are full of mishaps involving people with high-risk lifestyles. Despite the fact that major command and Air Force safety offices repeatedly publicize the dangers of fatigue, impaired driving, speeding, traffic conditions, and environmental factors that lead to accidents, some Air Force people are not learning from the mistakes of others.

Although airmen are on call 24 hours a day, they are free to choose, with very few limits, how they spend off-duty time. A person’s lifestyle influences other facets of their life, such as operating a vehicle. This influence directly affects the likelihood of being involved in a vehicle accident.

For example, when someone decides not to drive while impaired or fatigued, that reduces their mishap potential. When people take unnecessary risks such as drinking and driving, it increases the chances of being involved in a crash and endangering others.

So, if you are one of those who hasn’t heeded the advice of many and learned from others’ mistakes, here again are some ways to reduce your chances of being in a vehicle crash:

- **Practice safe behaviors.** Do not drink and drive, take a taxi, use a designated driver, or use the Airmen Against Drunk Driving program.

- **Do not speed.** Obey traffic laws. Adjust for road and weather conditions. Allow enough time and leave an appropriate stopping distance between vehicles.

- **Do not drive aggressively.** Be courteous to other drivers. Don’t assume the other drivers are as proficient as you are.

- **Do not drive while tired.** When traveling long distances, plan the trip to include rest stops and breaks. Stop when needed and avoid marathon driving.

- **Do not drive distracted.** Leave the cell phone and other gadgets alone. Focus on driving.

- **Use personal protective equipment.** Buckle up and use proper child safety seats, booster seats or restraints. Always wear motorcycle protective equipment.

- **Drive defensively** by watching out for the other guy. If one driver can cause a crash, then one driver can prevent one.

- **Practice risk management** in planning and executing the trip. If someone thinks it is unsafe, then it probably is unsafe.

Driving requires concentration, perception and judgment. Do not compromise safety for a moment. Before the key goes into the ignition, before the gear goes into drive, make sure you weigh all the risks. ►

