It doesn’t matter where you’re going. You could be on your way to work, to a doctor’s appointment, or to your child’s soccer game. When you’re driving, your full attention must be on the road. When it’s not, people get hurt.

Those of you who drive professionally may follow all the safety rules during the workday, such as making a pre-trip inspection and not using your cell phone. The question is, do you follow the same rules when you’re driving your daughter and her friends to the mall? Or when you and your spouse go on a weekend getaway? The hazards that create motor vehicle incidents (MVIs) are there whether you are driving for work or for pleasure. The same precautions must be taken to ensure that everyone gets home safely.

This article outlines some of the most common risk factors that lead to an MVI. Most are simple things you’ve probably heard about before, but it’s these simple things that continue to cause fatal MVIs.
Watch the weather
When you're planning your trip, always check the weather forecast.

• If it calls for a storm, consider changing your plans.
• If visibility is poor because of heavy snow or rain, pull off the road immediately and wait for it to pass.
• When there's a possibility of ice on the road, slow down.

Getting the job done is important, but your life is more important. Although that seems obvious, many of us don't take those reasonable precautions because we're in such a hurry to get to where we're going. In the planning stages, build in extra hours or even days so that you have enough time to stop and wait if the weather demands it. Respect Mother Nature—she's more powerful than we are.

Make sure everything works
Many drivers take for granted that their truck or car is in good working order. However, if you don't inspect things regularly, you won't know if something is wrong. For example, you may find out you have a problem with your windshield wipers just as you encounter a major rainstorm. Here is a list of things to check before you head out on the road. If one of them malfunctions when you need it, people's lives could be in danger.

• Windshield—make sure it's clean and has no cracks.
• Wipers—it's a good idea to keep spare wipers in your trunk.
• Mirrors—make sure they're clean and adjusted properly.
• Brakes—test them to be sure they work.
• Steering—if it seems loose or misaligned, pull over.
• Tires—ensure there are no leaks and that they're properly secured.

No distractions
The issue of drivers using cell phones and other electronic devices has been getting a lot of attention lately—for good reason. Driving requires your full attention. When you're trying to answer a call or read a text message, you inevitably take your eyes off the road. In those three or four seconds, you could cause a collision because you aren't paying attention to what's happening on the road around you.

Cell phones have become such a dangerous distraction to drivers that Ontario has made it illegal to use them while you're driving. If you are caught texting or talking on your cell phone when you're behind the wheel, you can be fined up to $280. Soon, you may also get demerit points.

But a cell phone, GPS, or other electronic device isn't the only thing that can distract a driver. We've all seen people putting on makeup or eating breakfast while they're driving. Obviously no one can drive properly when they're doing something like that. It's important to use common sense. Don't put your life or someone else's life in danger because you didn't get up early enough to have breakfast at home.

Stay rested and healthy
Getting enough sleep, eating well, and exercising are always healthy things to do, but they also help prevent MVIs. Fatigue can be as dangerous as texting when you're driving. Your concentration, vision, and reaction time are all affected when you're tired. Fatigued driving is like drunk driving in that there was a time when we didn't believe alcohol affected us behind the wheel. Of course now we know better, but we need the same kind of change in our attitude about fatigue.

For people who drive for a living, there are laws that govern the number of hours they may spend on the road. These regulations are an effort to minimize fatigued driving. But ultimately, it's up to each of us to use our own judgment and admit when we're too tired to drive.

Training and education
Driver training and education make a real difference in the quality of driving on our roads. Defensive driving is good training for everyone to have. If you drive for a living, try to avoid picking up bad habits by refreshing your training often. Talk to your supervisor about specific training that you think would help you do your job more safely. Look at your company's health and safety program, and find out what the policy is on vehicle inspections, driving in poor weather, and using electronic devices (such as a GPS).

Take advantage of all the training available to you. IHSA offers several courses, workshops, and seminars, such as Defensive Driving, Hours of Service, Pre-Trip Inspection, Fleet Driver Training, and School Bus Driver Improvement Course. Visit ihsa.ca/training for course descriptions, dates, and locations.