



# PREVENTING INTERIOR DISASTERS

Anything that is not properly stored in a vehicle has the danger of becoming a flying projectile during a harsh or sudden stop. Stay safe and know what dangers to watch for. **BY LAUREN FLETCHER**

**D**rivers end up keeping many items within arm's reach while driving, such as sunglasses, mp3 players, smartphones, even tablets; however, there is an inherent danger in keeping these items nearby instead of ensuring they're properly stowed while driving.

All fleet managers are aware of the importance of a safety belt to keep a driver safe inside a vehicle; the same goes for personal items.

"At 50 mph, a sudden stop caused by a crash will propel a loose, 16 ounce bottle of water and land a blow on a vehicle occupant with the equivalent force of a 21-pound object," stated Art Liggio, president of Driving Dynamics. "Imagine what a laptop could do to you? It would be painful at a minimum, or, even worse, a hit to the head could cause someone to blackout."

## Preventing Additional Dangers

For most drivers and fleet managers, the dangers of loose objects flies under the radar screen and is never considered.

"Around here at Driving Dynamics, we refer to them as 'UFOs,' or unnecessary flying objects," Liggio said. "Loose items present a serious risk to drivers. Each year, loose objects cause thousands of serious injuries."

A 2012 study by Safety Research and Strategies found that ordinary objects in cars and trucks are responsible for 13,000 injuries each year.

"Going over and above the issue of direct contact and harm is the hazard related to loose objects and emergency braking," Liggio added. "When conditions arise requiring drivers to engage in emergency



PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/MAGIMOS

**Loose items, from water bottles to smartphones, can become dangerous "unnecessary flying objects" during a crash, and can also lodge beneath accelerator or brake pedals causing further disaster potential.**

braking procedures, too often they fail to successfully complete the maneuver. Surprisingly, this isn't because they lack the skills or an escape route, but simply because a loose object becomes lodged under the brake pedal."

Similarly, drivers can momentarily become visually distracted (impaired) by an object catapulted through the cabin or by liquids spilling onto him or her.

"In the blink of an eye, this avoidable distraction consumes the time needed to safely react to the situation," Liggio warned.

And, while loose objects add to the risk of a dangerous injury or fatality during a crash, Safety Research and Strategies estimated a driver's risk of dying in a car accident increases by 25 percent if there are unrestrained passengers in the vehicle

"As a driver — in addition to securing loose objects to stay safe — make sure

your passengers do not have the potential of becoming 'UFOs.' Insist that everyone buckles up before you start your trip," Liggio noted.

Some tips include:

- Keep all bulkier, heavier items stored in the vehicle's trunk or use a storage net.
- Unless an item (such as a GPS device) has a secure clip-in system, store all such items in a closed compartment.
- When spec'ing vehicles, ensure proper storage options are provided if drivers typically must carry files and/or laptops with them.

Bottom line, drivers must be made aware of the often forgotten, but potentially fatal danger of loose items in a vehicle during a crash or sudden braking activity. Include instructions in the fleet's policy directing drivers to secure all loose items before operating a vehicle. 