



The Traffic Safety Challenges of Returning Veterans:

Returning veterans face a number of challenges when they arrive home, from reintegrating into their “normal” lives at home or work to trying to shake the idea that the vehicle in the next lane is trying to blow them up. Two factors that impact driving safety are “carryover” driving behaviors and impaired driving resulting from alcohol or drug abuse and medications for multiple chronic conditions.

- **“Carry-Over” Driving Techniques** – driving techniques that were potentially lifesaving during a deployment but can become deadly on civilian roadways.

In War Zones	At Home
Drives as far as possible from the road edge to avoid IEDs	Drives in the middle of the road, straddling lanes
Changes direction and lanes unexpectedly, especially at tunnels or underpasses where insurgents might be waiting	Weaves through traffic. Does not signal turns, merges or lane changes. Avoids or changes lanes at underpasses and tunnels.
Always moving. Does not stop for traffic or people. Always has the right of way.	Anxious when stopped or “boxed in”. Rolls through traffic lights and stop signs. Does not yield right of way to other vehicles.
Speeds as fast as the lead vehicle in the convoy.	Drives over posted speed limit.
Hyper-vigilant of roadside elements.	Overly attentive to roadside elements.

- **Impaired driving** that results from alcohol or drug abuse and medications for multiple chronic conditions including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and/or Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs).

- **Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs)** – Nearly 30% of all service personnel with combat-related injuries between 2003-2005 sustained a TBI. 78% of those TBIs were caused by either a blast or explosion.

TBI Problem	Effects on Driving
Visual – blurred or double vision. Missing part of visual field.	Does not respond to important road, traffic or warning information.
Vestibular – dizziness, vertigo (thinking things are moving).	Rear-ends vehicle because it seems to be moving.
Spatial.	Misjudges distance when stopping or turning.
Hand-eye coordination.	Falls to maintain constant position in a lane.
Slowed reaction time.	Is slow to identify and avoid potentially hazardous situations.
Diminished attention.	Causes collisions or near misses.
Problem-solving/judgment.	Struggles to make a decision. Drives at inappropriate speeds (too fast or too slow).
Memory deficits.	Gets lost, even in familiar areas. Needs help from passengers.
Emotional.	Easily frustrated. Blames other drivers for their mistakes.

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
 - PTSD can occur with TBI.
 - 18.5% of service members who have returned from Iraq & Afghanistan currently have PTSD or depression.
 - PTSD is characterized by avoidance, re-experiencing symptoms and hypervigilance.
 - Correcting vision problems from TBI will lessen PTSD symptoms because the person can identify an object.

Resources

If you are a veteran or know a veteran struggling with a chronic condition such as PTSD, TBI, substance abuse, safe driving issues, or trouble adjusting in general and would like to learn more about what is available, please consider contacting the following agencies:

Binghamton Vet Center: 607-722-2393

Broome County Veteran Services www.gobroomecounty.com/veterans

Southern Tier Veterans Support Group www.stvsg.org

Brain Injury Association www.bianys.org

Broome County STOP-DWI Program www.bcstopdwi.com

Broome County Traffic Safety Program www.gobroomecounty.com/hd/tsp

