Most of us have been involved in at least one – but we'd rather not be involved at all. What are we talking about? It's accidents.

Accidents – not just motor vehicle – are considered unintentional acts, often caused by human error, poor judgment, equipment malfunctions or through nature or weather-related causes.

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, accidents are the fifth cause of deaths in adults, causing approximately 119,000 deaths per year. The latest report shows that more than 119 million people visited the hospital emergency room for accident-related injuries. Accidents cause a staggering $652 billion in damage, including medical costs, lost wages, litigation, insurance costs and more.

Some accidents can be lessened or even prevented. In this newsletter, we'll list the top accident occurrences and tips on how you can prevent injury and keep yourself safe.

Motor vehicle accidents
This is the number one cause of accidents for all age groups (except for infants). Vehicle crashes cause motorists $164.2 billion per year, with nearly 43,000 annual deaths. With approximately 250 million vehicles on the road – each weighing in at a half-ton or more, statistics show an accident occurs every two minutes.

Below are some common causes of accidents:
- Distractions. Among teenager drivers, this is the leading cause of accidents. Talking or texting with a cell phone takes eyes and concentration off the road. It's not just teens, either. Think of the times you've looked away for just a second to retrieve a dropped object or adjust the stereo. If you must take a call, safely pull over to a parking lot or to the side of the road, and put your emergency flashers on. More states have laws that restrict the use of cell phones while driving. To find out which states comply visit: http://www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/cellphone_laws.html.
- Don’t text and drive.
- Drunk driving. This one is easy to prevent – just don’t drink and drive or get into a car with an intoxicated person. Make it a habit to call a taxi if you’re going to drink alcohol. In addition, watch out for drunk drivers – the highest number of drunk driving deaths occurs at night.
- Driver fatigue. Approximately 37 percent of drivers have fallen asleep at the wheel. To remedy this, take frequent breaks, keep fresh air circulating and turn the radio up.
- Rule breaking. We have speed limits, seat belts, stoplights and turn signals for a reason – to keep ourselves and other drivers safe. Make sure you follow the basic rules of the road.
- Faulty equipment. Keep your car well tuned and maintain scheduled checkups.

Don’t text and drive.
Weather. Weather-related driving hazards, such as ice, snow, fog and rain, can contribute to many accidents. Sometimes these can’t be avoided, so it’s best to drive defensively during hazardous weather.

For driving tips, visit the “traffic safety” link from the National Highway Traffic Safety Commission at http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov.

Poisoning
This is the second leading cause of accidents for adults age 35 to 54. In 2006, there were nearly 24,000 unintentional poisoning deaths in the United States. When you think of poisoning, you may think of someone slipping something into your drink – like in the movies. However, poisonings can occur with legal prescription drugs, an overdose from illegal street drugs or inhaling household chemicals. There are a few ways to prevent poisoning with you or with your children:

1. Always read the labels before using a product. Even if it’s always stored in the same place, turn on a light and read the label again.
2. Keep medications in original bottles and don’t leave pills sitting out.
3. Keep all pills, household cleaners and chemicals out of the reach of children.
4. Read labels on household chemicals and don’t mix substances together.
5. To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, never run your car’s engine in an enclosed area.

Keep this number handy! If you do ingest a poison, call the Poison Prevention hotline at 1-800-222-1222. For more poison prevention tips, contact the Poison Prevention Council at http://www.poisonprevention.org/materials.htm.

Drowning
Drowning is the third leading cause of death for children age 5 to 14. Approximately three children die every day as a result of drowning. The good news is that parents can play a key role in protecting children from drowning. Here’s how:

- Make life jackets a “must,” even if kids know how to swim. Do not rely on water wings as a life-saving device.
- Be on the lookout at all times. Supervise young kids around all bodies of water, including swimming pools, bathtubs and lakes.
- Don’t be distracted. When you’re reading a book at the beach, you’re not able to keep an eye on your child.
- Fence it off. If you have a pool, make sure you have a good fence with self-latching gates.

Take swimming lessons and learn CPR. If a drowning does occur, CPR may help save a life.

For more information, contact the National Drowning Prevention Alliance at http://www.ndpa.org/tips/layers.htm.

Falls
Accidental falls is the leading cause of death for adults 65 and older. In addition, more people of all ages are treated in the hospital for falls than any other type of injury. Falls may cause hip and spine fractures, internal injuries, head traumas and more.

People can take steps to reduce their falls, including:

- Exercise regularly. Take a program that includes strength training (lifting weights or resistance) or participate in a class, such as Tai Chi, that improves balance.
- Ask your physician to review medications. Certain drugs can cause side effects, especially if taken with other drugs or alcohol.
- Reduce hazards in the home. Install good lighting near stairs. Make sure the rugs have nonstick pads underneath them. Clean up spills immediately.

For more information, visit http://www.homesafetycouncil.org and click on “safe seniors,” then on “safe steps.”

More injury deaths
In addition, there are other accidental deaths related to recreational and work activities, fires, natural disasters, firearms, machinery malfunctions and more. A little prevention can go a long way in saving a life. For basic injury prevention for a variety of topics, visit http://www.cdc.gov/injury/.

Source:
(1) Statistics about accidental deaths cited in this newsletter were obtained from the National Center for Health Statistics, from the Centers for Disease Control http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/index.htm accessed on 3/5/09.