

## Road Warrior Risk Reminders



By Emily Stumhofer

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“And when it’s time for leavin’, I hope you’ll understand... that I was born a ramblin’ man.”

– “Ramblin’ Man,” Allman Brothers Band

Summertime is filled with vacations, excursions and road trips of varying lengths. Some of us venture out for personal reasons, while others plan trips for the clients and consumers we serve at our nonprofit organizations.

My latest summer adventure involved a fast-paced 3.5-day cross-country (Virginia to Washington) road trip. Not only was I driving an older car while towing a trailer, I was also trying to maintain contact with two of my family members, each in a different car or large truck, and each with varying degrees of cell phone reception! Although this wasn’t my first long-distance rodeo, it was possibly the most exciting, partly due to the challenging and more difficult aspects of the trip. Reflecting on my travels, I’ve devised a few road warrior risk tips for those of you who are planning to spend an extended amount of time on the road this summer.

- **Check, Check, Before You Go** – During my family’s recent road trip, we were driving two padlocked moving trucks. It wasn’t until we were about an hour from home and needed to rearrange some of the packed gear that we realized we’d left the padlock keys behind. Needless to say, it was a huge setback on time and it started the road trip off on a somewhat negative note. To avoid time-wasting setbacks like the one we encountered, think ahead about the essential things you’ll need and create a checklist (especially when in a situation as chaotic as moving an entire household!). Ask a colleague or family member to review your packing list before you hit the road.
- **Stay Sane by Breaking it Down** – For my trip, the end destination was the only one we really had in focus in the days leading up to our departure. However, on the first day we began by agreeing where we would meet up at the end of the day. We followed that practice throughout the trip. This worked well because we could take into account the traffic and weather conditions that we were expecting each day. It also enabled the three of us to move at our own paces and not worry about keeping one another in eyesight, while also managing to drive unusually heavy vehicles. By reminding yourself about the day’s goal, rather than the enormity of the trip, you’ll be able to focus on what’s important here and now: staying cool, keeping safe, and getting to your next rest and refresh point. Identifying micro-goals can go a long way to keep nonprofit team members satisfied and feeling connected to your mission—even in the face of a daunting project or strategic goal. Remember to celebrate some of your team’s smaller achievements, and you’ll be better able to maintain your energy for the long haul.
- **Be Prepared for Bumps Along the Way** – It’s always smart to have your car checked out by a mechanic prior to leaving on a long-haul trip, but don’t rely on this check as a guarantee that you won’t experience mechanical challenges. During our trip, we encountered a flat tire, a tire blow-out, a dragging

trailer attachment chain, and two low-oil crises. Understanding the potentially risky situations you might face, knowing how to complete basic maintenance procedures like oil checks and fixing a flat, and having someone to call in an emergency (and a fully-charged phone with accessible service!) are essential to a successful trip. If your colleagues or direct reports are hitting the road this summer, consider providing basic driver safety or emergency response training, and include a car inspection checklist in any vehicle that you provide to staff and volunteers. Ensure that your team members will be prepared to respond to unpredictable conditions or events on the road.

- **Create a Healthy Routine and Stick to It** – Maintaining your usual eating, drinking, sleeping and exercise routines can be very difficult while on the road. Try to create a manageable routine while traveling, such as drinking 24 ounces of water every hour, taking a 10-minute walk every time you stop for gas, or pulling over and closing your eyes for a few minutes when you start feeling fatigued. It can also be difficult to find fresh or fulfilling meals on the road, especially in some of the more remote parts of the country. Visit a grocery store and stock up on some of your favorite fruits and drinks, especially those that will be hard to find at isolated rest stops. Also remember that when work deliverables are daunting and project timelines are compressed, work-life balance is hard to maintain and employees may struggle to uphold their own healthy routines. Help your employees and volunteers maintain their health during project marathons, and consider offering your staff teams a short reprieve after performing well during a stressful period.
- **The Journey is as Important (and possibly as fun) as the Destination** – It's been a few years since I hit my 50th state, but it's still exhilarating to drive through different parts of the country with unique landscapes and traditions. Whether your road trip is through a distant part of your own state or in a culturally diverse country abroad, take in the sights and enjoy the journey even when the destination is the reason for it all. The same sentiment holds true for risk management. Resolve to experience your risk journey with an open mind and a desire to learn, and your risk management program will have a stronger foundation for all the perspectives and lessons you took in along the way.

At the end of my trip, I was (and still am) utterly exhausted with the stress and mindfulness it took to fit a 50+ hour road trip into less than a week. However, the thrill of driving through 14 states and finally making it to the destination after a number of unforeseen setbacks and difficulties along the way made it all worth it. My next big road trip will be to and from the same locations, but I'm already thinking about how I'll change up my route in order to visit new places along the way and I've already begun thinking about my pre-trip checklist. Every trip you take will bring new lessons and takeaways about what you can do better next time, and ultimately these reflections will make you a stronger Road Warrior. Use my road trip lessons to bolster your plans, and make the most of your next mission-advancing, client-serving, or vacation road trip!

*Emily Stumhofer is staff attorney at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your questions about planning your next road trip, or any other risk management topic at 703.777.3504 or [Emily@nonprofitrisk.org](mailto:Emily@nonprofitrisk.org).*