

When Should Seniors Hang Up the Driving Gloves?



Who should decide when it's time for a senior to quit driving? We recently heard about the [Japanese government bribing its seniors](#) to get them off the roads. Should the U.S. force its elders from the road, too?

It's a question that Dennis P. McCarthy,

co-director of the National Older Driver Research & Training Center at the University of Florida, hears all the time.

"It's a tough decision since we all age at a different rate, so you can't identify an unsafe driver based on age and have to look at how people function on an individual basis," he said. "In California, the Department of Motor Vehicles has a pilot program going to train its workers to identify potential problems when people come in (for driver's license renewals) with functional difficulties, such as using a mobility device, or have trouble with their visual testing."

Public perception is that if you take away a senior's license, he or she will simply take the bus.

"But if the senior has leg problems that make it difficult to use car pedals, how will they climb bus stairs?" McCarthy said. "And if they have vision problems, how can they see the bus schedule? Seniors have to see doctors, get medicine and buy groceries, and if they have no public transportation or can't use it, they are forced to keep driving."

To enable seniors to drive safer longer, the National Older Driver's Center, in cooperation with the American Automobile Association, has compiled a list {link here: aaa.com/news} of cars with equipment and features needed for seniors with vision and mobility problems to continue driving safely.

"The solution isn't to get older people off the road, but to get them on the road by providing alternative transportation through local transit services for people with physical problems and community volunteer networks to take seniors where they need to go," McCarthy said. But, again, the question is who decides when it's time for a senior to stop driving.

"The family has to ask if they'd let their parents drive their kids and grandkids anywhere," McCarthy said. "If the answer is no, then they need for the parent or parents to see an occupational therapist." McCarthy is an occupational therapist who works to rehabilitate drivers with problems. The American Occupational Therapy Association keeps a listing of its members by area.

"Three things can happen from the visit," he said. "The therapist may say the person actually is fine and can continue to drive, or he might find a problem that can be fixed just by adding equipment to the car to prolong safe driving, or he can decide the driver needs to be taken off the road. Then the therapist is the bad guy, not the family, for taking the keys away. The population is growing older. This problem isn't going to go away."

Posted by Jim Mateja on April 10, 2008 in [Car Buying](#), [Jim Mateja](#), [Pop Culture](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(3\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

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