Motor Vehicle Fleet Operations

**PS:** Describe your roles as chair and vice chair of the Z15 Accredited Standards Committee (ASC), Safety Requirements for Motor Vehicle Fleet Operations.

**Bill:** As Z15 chair, I provide leadership to the committee and to serve as the point person for the standard. I work closely with Tim Fisher, ASSE’s director of practices and standards. In the 2 years leading up to the standard’s revision, I organized meetings, coordinated communications with subcommittees and kept the revision process on schedule.

Behind the scenes, I (along with our vice chair and committee members) work closely with ASSE to review inquiries, assess feedback and provide interpretations to the standard as questions arise. In addition, I work closely with committee membership to promote the standard through presentations at ASSE’s annual Professional Development Conference, articles in safety publications and presentations at various other safety venues.

**Terry:** As vice chair of the Z15 ASC, I support the chair, committee members and ASSE by improving the standard so we provide a valuable work product for educating and improving the safety of our stakeholders.

**PS:** What are the first steps an organization should take when creating a distracted driving policy? What key elements should it include?

**Bill:** When the first edition of the Z15 standard was developed (2006), the committee recognized that distracted driving was becoming a significant vehicle operations hazard. Yet, the extent of the problem was not clear. Hence, the standard treaded lightly on the issue. In the years leading up to the 2012 revision, study after study quantified what we suspected.

With the exponentially increasing use of technology (both mobile technology and on-board systems), research has clearly demonstrated a direct correlation between the use of technology in vehicles and crashes. The 2012 standard put more emphasis on distracted driving, including clear explanatory information as well as a sample distracted driving policy within the appendices. Yet, the standard remains nonprescriptive. This allows organizations to craft their own policies, define particular distractions and establish their own controls or prohibitions.

That said, organizations should purchase the standard, talk to peers in organizations who have implemented policies and obtain copies of articles and research studies. Use this information to approach organization management regarding the hazard.

Key elements include a description of the problem of distracted driving, a definition of what distracted driving includes, specific policies and company requirements (what is prohibited) and disciplinary consequences for violations.

**Terry:** I think an organization needs to first understand the issues/risks its drivers face when conducting their business. Secondly, an organization must determine the tools or technology required for drivers to perform their work (e.g., computers, GPS, cell phones) and to perform their work safely. Policy elements should include clearly defined requirements, driver training/education on driving while distracted, testimonials and lessons learned as well as consequences for not following the policy.

**PS:** As technology advances, how do you anticipate technology-based distractions will change and/or increase?

**Bill:** The potential of distraction from technology use is an ever-increasing exposure. The more features available on smartphones (e.g., television applications, videos), the more the temptation exists. On-board technology is becoming more available. Marketers have introduced more hands-free features, such as voice-activated and Bluetooth options. Regulators, with all good intentions, have created laws prohibiting handheld use but permitting hands-free operation of devices.

However, research has proven that distraction is cognitive. Texting or dialing takes a person’s eyes off the road. This hazard is eliminated if motorists obey handheld laws. However, these regulations ignore the cognitive piece and I contend actually promote technology use and cognitive distraction. On-board systems are becoming more
complex. The automotive and technology industries have an important responsibility and challenge to develop controls to address these increasing hazards.

**Terry:** The increase of communication device technology and the perceived need by many to multitask are creating more distractions for drivers. People are on the go and are expected to be available at all times. The technology that brings us great tools also increases our constant need to interact with these tools. Most lose sight that the primary task is driving from point A to point B safely.

**PS:** How can distracted driving policies keep pace with such changes in driving distractions?

**Bill:** Policies should clearly define distractions and include specific prohibitions for using technology while a vehicle is not in park.

**Terry:** Distracted driving policies must be reviewed on a regular basis. The team should include senior management, insurance and risk management, safety professionals and drivers. Short of prohibiting the use of technologies while the vehicle is moving, constant dialogue needs to occur to assess and manage driving distractions via a controlled and systematic approach.

**PS:** What is the best way for an organization to assess the level of distracted driving among employees? How can an accurate assessment be obtained?

**Bill:** Short of video monitoring, it is an issue of trust and honor. Monitoring may be viewed as intrusive and is probably not practical for employees operating personal vehicles for organization business. Policies must be clear on the disciplinary consequences. Incident investigators should review police reports for evidence of distraction as a cause or contributing factor.

**Terry:** I do not believe any single solution exists. There needs to be 1) manager ridealong commentary with the driver; 2) review of motor vehicle incidents; 3) establishment of distracted driving policies with consequences for failing to comply; 4) driver education and training; and 5) a metric or key performance indicator that measures distracted driving. This may be controversial, but some companies require in-vehicle cameras/recording devices for mitigating liabilities in the event of an incident and for evaluating driver behavior.

**PS:** How can organizations with fleets effectively enforce a distracted driving policy among drivers who routinely cross state lines?

**Bill:** An organization’s policy applies whether or not a driver crosses state lines. In fact, a thoughtfully crafted policy eliminates the issue of changing laws in different jurisdictions.

**Terry:** A distracted driving policy needs to be uniformly applied to all drivers regardless of where they travel. States can have more restricted rules, and drivers are required to know and adhere to all rules of the road, regardless of in which state they drive.

**PS:** How can organizations create a formal distracted driving policy?

**Bill:** Organizations can take the following steps:

1. Quantify the specific exposure within the context of your organization’s operation.
2. Audit existing organization policies, comparing them to the sample policy in the standard’s appendices.
3. Analyze accident statistics documented within the research available on the exposure.
4. Draft a suggested organization policy.
5. Approach organization management armed with statistics to help illustrate the potential adverse economic impact of distraction on the organization’s bottom line.

**Terry:** My recommendations are:

1. Review the Z15.1 standard for an overall understanding of motor vehicle fleet operations.

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2) Review the sample distracted driving policy.
3) Benchmark with other organizations.

**PS: In light of the recent national focus on preventing distracted driving, do you feel it has decreased or grown worse?**

**Bill:** [National] efforts have increased awareness and have reduced the hazard. Yet, laws are not uniform, and enforcement varies. I cannot drive 2 miles where I live without observing individuals talking on a cell phone. Texting (particularly among younger drivers) continues. There is more to be done. Many states have enacted strict legislation, real enforcement and communication programs.

For example, New York State has recently enacted a new statute that prohibits the use of handheld technology. Penalties include the assessment of five violation points to a driver’s motor vehicle record and a fine of up to $150. For drivers with a probationary license, the first offense results in a 60-day license suspension. Subsequent violations have increasing penalties. Enforced, this law will prove to be a strong deterrent.

**Terry:** Various initiatives have been implemented to raise awareness and to reduce drivers’ risks. Many states and communities have passed legislation to prohibit or to restrict the use of technology while driving. I believe that distracted driving has increased in recent years primarily due to advances in technology, as mentioned. This combined with the relatively low cost of cell phones, GPS, iPhones and the like facilitates more driver opportunities to multitask, particularly while driving. This can lead to drivers’ overconfidence in their ability to drive while distracted.

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