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Building a Fleet Safety Program

By Peter Van Dyne

In 2005, transportation-related incidents were the number one cause of work-related fatalities, with highway incidents alone accounting for nearly one out of four fatal work injuries. These statistics underscore why companies should have a robust fleet safety program that protects employees and keeps them on the job.

An effective fleet safety program addresses a wide range of motor vehicle exposures, including employees' use of company vehicles, personal vehicles, hired vehicles and public transportation. The four basic program elements are:

- Driver selection
- Safe driving expectations
- Driver performance monitoring and assessment
- Training that incorporates company expectations and safe driving concepts

Driver Selection

Construction executives should start the driver selection process by identifying all of the jobs that require motor vehicle operation and by defining the driving record requirements necessary for each job to ensure that drivers selected meet the company's safe driving expectations. In addition to jobs requiring full-time drivers, look at the jobs requiring daily travel to jobsites as well as those requiring occasional travel to meetings or offsite functions. Follow that review with a look at employees' driving records to ensure that the right people are behind the wheel.

While individual driving records do not always predict which drivers will be in crashes, a strong relationship exists between driving records and crash rates. For example, a company that uses cars and light and heavy trucks in its operations reviewed the driving records and incident rates for all of its drivers during the course of one year. The findings showed that company drivers with zero or one violation on their driving records had an incident rate of one crash for every 13 drivers, while drivers with two or more violations had an incident rate of one crash for every three drivers.

Driving records divide listed convictions into three groups of violations: moving, serious and disqualifying. Moving violations are the most common and include speeding, failure to obey

traffic signs or signals, improper turns and driving the wrong way. Serious violations include alcohol- or drug-related charges, reckless driving and excessive speeding. Disqualifying violations, which indicate a driver has a serious disregard for public safety, include evading an officer, felony use of a motor vehicle, speeding in a school zone and crossing railroad tracks against a signal.

Basic driver selection criteria should allow for no more than two moving violations in the past three years, no serious violations in the past five years and no disqualifying violations. These criteria must be documented, communicated and consistently enforced at all levels of the organization. Ensure that anyone authorized to drive on company business meets the criteria before getting behind the wheel. Selecting drivers with clean driving records—as opposed to those who just meet expectations—will yield better results. Enforcing driving record criteria shows that a company values safety and expects drivers to operate motor vehicles in a safe manner.

Safe Driving Expectations

An overall program should outline all of the company's driving expectations—even those that might seem too basic to address. Drivers must:

- Possess a valid license for the type of vehicle driven
- Use passenger vehicle restraints when in company vehicles, personal vehicles used for company business, rental vehicles and public transportation
- Require passengers to use vehicle restraints
- Clean and inspect windows and lights prior to use
- Comply with traffic regulations
- Operate vehicles based on existing conditions rather than on the posted speed limit
- Maintain a one-second minimum following distance for each ten feet of vehicle length (double or triple in bad weather)
- Refrain from engaging in other activities while driving, including using mobile phones, reading, taking notes, grooming, eating, drinking, etc.
- Maintain company vehicles and personal vehicles used on company business per the manufacturers' recommendations
- Refrain from driving vehicles that are not in good condition
- Prohibit motor vehicle operation when fatigued or impaired
- Allow company vehicles to be used only by authorized employees
- Establish and follow plans for regularly traveled routes based on the safest route for the vehicle used
- Secure insurance coverage that meets the minimum liability limits required by the company for all personal vehicles used on company business and notify the company of changes in insurance
- Notify a supervisor of all driving record violations and convictions

Driver Performance Monitoring

Annually monitor driver performance to compare each driver's actual performance against established safe driving expectations. However, such monitoring provides limited insight if the company has not established the right expectations.

The company should review the individual's driving record, crashes and compliance with company fleet safety expectations using a combination of observation, technology and

manager feedback. For example, speeding can be identified by looking at fuel mileage because drivers who speed and tailgate get lower fuel mileage. Comparing the fuel mileage for vehicles operating in a similar area provides a valid comparison.

Technology can also accurately gauge performance. Any size fleet can use GPS to track speed, stops and on-time departure information, and cameras offer feedback on driver actions and fatigue. Heavy truck fleets should use engine data for evaluation.

No matter what technology is used to track performance, the key to obtaining helpful results is to review data throughout the year as part of an ongoing performance management system.

Training

Training is not a quick fix and does not work when implemented in one-shot seminars. Crashes occur because of behaviors and risks drivers choose to take—not because of a lack of knowledge. For training to be successful, it must address behavior by incorporating safe driving concepts, company expectations and the company's fleet safety policies and processes used to evaluate driver performance. Drivers who know what they should do and how the company will measure their performance provide the best payback on the resources invested in training.

Overall Fleet Risk Management

Beyond the four elements outlined above, other fleet safety issues are essential to effective risk management.

- Document enforcement activities to prove the program is followed consistently. This will be useful should the company's commitment to safety be questioned after a crash.
- Requalify new drivers after an acquisition to ensure that they meet the same standards as existing drivers.
- Include a policy statement about fleet safety from the company's top operating officer to help enforce the program on all levels.
- Show that the fleet safety policy applies to company vehicles, non-owned vehicles and personal vehicles used on company business.
- Require and verify minimum liability limits for all personal vehicles used on company business. The limits can be established by looking at work demographics. Younger employees and lower-paid employees do not have assets to protect and may carry state minimums. Executives should require minimum liability limits of \$100,000/\$300,000, but keep in mind that limits of \$300,000/\$300,000 or \$250,000/\$500,000 provide better protection than state minimums.
- Establish restrictions on the personal use of company vehicles, trucks or other equipment. Limit personal use to those with assigned passenger vehicles. Spouses or significant others should meet the same driving record criteria and be limited to incidental use. Use by children or others should be prohibited.
- Expect managers to enforce the program. A manager who rides with and says nothing to an employee who speeds is condoning the behavior.

By following these guidelines, drivers will operate more responsibly and more safely, which helps protect them and others on the road. A fleet safety program also helps protect a company's assets and reputation while mitigating the leading cause of work-related fatalities.

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