



Driving the Message Home: Implement and Enforce On-The-Job Traffic Safety Policies

The most dangerous threat to American workers is not in the office or on the plant floor, but on the road. Work-related motor vehicle crashes have been the leading cause of on-the-job deaths in the United States since at least 1992, according to NIOSH. Between 1992 and 2001 motor vehicle crashes accounted for 13,337 worker deaths – an annual average of 1,300 deaths, NIOSH reported. And in 2002, vehicle-related incidents accounted for 43 percent of the 4,900 preventable deaths at U.S. workplaces, according to National Safety Council data.

The result of vehicle incidents is staggering human and economic loss. U.S. employers spend more than \$40 billion on on-the-job crashes, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Moreover, according to the National Safety Council, roadway crash injuries result in the most costly claims against workers' compensation insurance for lost time – averaging more than \$27,500 per claim filed in 2001 and 2002.

Laying the Foundation

When it comes to safe driving, much of the responsibility lies with employees themselves. In most situations, supervisors have no way of knowing if a worker is buckled up, for example. The key is to indoctrinate workers from the moment they are hired. The more the corporate safety culture emphasizes safe driving, the more likely the employee is to adhere to policy, said Josie Sharp, director of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Bureau of Motor Vehicles, Harrisburg.

Employers "should have a focus on a strong, all-around safety culture as opposed to playing watchdog on a particular policy," Sharp said.

Safety on the job begins with the hiring process, said Jim McFarlin, director of safety and security for ABF Freight Systems, a Fort Smith, AR-based shipping company and secretary of the associate advisory committee of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance, a Washington-based nonprofit organization that promotes motor transportation safety throughout North America. "We check drivers' backgrounds for accidents and moving citations, and include questions about safe driving habits on the application. If applicants are professional drivers, we will contact previous employers to check past driving records," McFarlin said.

Kathy Lusby-Treber, executive director of the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, said employers should take safe driving even further by requiring employees to "put it in writing." Employees should sign a written agreement pledging that driving safely is their No. 1 priority when they are behind the wheel, Lusby-Treber said. The Network of Employers for Traffic Safety is a Vienna, VA-based nonprofit organization that seeks to reduce the incidence of work-related crashes.

The Nuts and Bolts of Traffic Safety

Any corporate traffic safety program should include certain essentials. Chief among these is a requirement that all employees wear seat belts at all times while driving or riding in any vehicle on company business. A NIOSH hazard review document called the mandatory use of seat belts "the single most important driver safety policy that employers can implement and enforce." And for one very strong



and simple reason – seat belts save lives. NHTSA estimated that in 2000, the use of seat belts prevented 11,889 fatalities in the United States, and could have prevented 9,238 fatalities that did occur, had the occupants buckled up.

Seat belts are the most important, but not the only essential traffic safety measure. “All organizations – regardless of size or industry type – that have employees driving company vehicles or personal vehicles should have a seat belt policy, an alcohol and drug policy, and a driver distraction policy,” according to Lusby-Treber of the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety.

In its hazard review, NIOSH identified additional elements that employers should include in driving programs:

- Ensure employees who drive on the job have valid licenses.
- Incorporate fatigue management into safety programs.

According to the National Safety Council, 37 percent of drivers have nodded off for at least a moment or fallen asleep while driving at least once in their driving career. To help prevent this:

- Provide fleet vehicles that offer the highest possible levels of occupant protection in the event of a crash.
- Ensure employees receive necessary training to operate specialized vehicles.
- Offer periodic vision screening and general physicals for employees whose primary job is driving.
- Avoid requiring workers to drive irregular hours or significantly extended hours.
- Set policies in accordance with states’ graduated licensing laws and child labor laws.

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