

## Risk Control

### The Need for a Fleet Safety Program

#### Introduction

A company needs a fleet program to provide legal and humanitarian guidance for controlling vehicle exposures. Rules provide employees with guidelines to make the right decision and provide control for economic reasons. Proper training and fleet safety rules must be followed to prevent accidents, loss of equipment, time delays, reduced production and injuries to productive employees.

The following information reviews the key issues needed for a fleet safety program and provides a basic outline that can be used to create a customized program for controlling vehicle exposures and documentation.

#### Facts

1. Paid losses associated with accidents involving trucks have increased significantly.
2. Physical damage costs have increased marginally due to higher vehicle and repair cost.
3. Much of the significant increase in paid losses is due to medical costs, punitive damage awards and legal fees.
4. Accidents resulting in litigation have increased sharply. More than half of all accidents involving extensive physical damage and/or bodily injury claims result in litigation.
5. Punitive damage awards are more frequent and dollar amounts are higher.

#### Key Issues

- Management awareness of vehicle operations and issues
- Driver selection and retention
- Drug and alcohol issues
- Non-owned vehicles used on company business issues
- Personal use of company vehicle issues
- Driver performance and accountability issues
- DOT compliance
- Driver training
- Fleet Safety Program (the need for a fully organized and documented program)

#### Know Hazards/Exposures

As with most programs, one needs to understand the exposures by doing some type of an analysis that covers:

- Management/leadership involvement
- Accountability
- Automobile drivers
- Accident review
- Driver qualification
- Driver training
- Vehicle maintenance

#### Trends and Root Cause Analysis

**Trends** can be found by reviewing loss history of accidents to find re-occurrences such as changing lanes, turning and backing up accidents that keep happening in the same location, by the same driver or same type vehicle.

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**Root cause** is to search out the fundamental contributor to the accident. Most companies never find or look for the root cause. They assume or jump to conclusions that the driver or some equipment part just needs to be fixed.

Example: Two accidents occur, one involves backing up and one involves making a U turn at the same job site. The company may blame the driver. However, the root cause was poor directions/no maps and poor signage at the job site entrance.

## Driver Selection and Placement

- Application with reference checks
- Written test
- Physical examination records
- Copy of driver's license
- Training records
- Listing of traffic violations
- Interview notes results
- Road test documentation
- Motor vehicle records check
- License validity confirmation
- Disciplinary warnings

## New Driver Orientation

- Review of written company policy
- Alcohol/narcotics/drug abuse
- Hazardous materials regulations
- Vehicle inspection and maintenance policy
- Emergency procedures/communications
- Driver logs procedures
- Loading bracing blocking
- Customer site safety rules
- Driving in poor weather conditions
- Awareness of driver fatigue
- Speeding policy
- Defensive driving procedures
- Rail/highway crossing procedures
- Procedures for reporting accidents
- Handling of commodities
- Fueling procedures
- Familiarization with equipment
- Familiarization with routes
- Requirements for owner operators
- Cargo security provisions

## Regular Scheduled Driver Training

- Defensive driver training
- Properly hitching trailers
- Driving in poor weather
- Review of company policy
- Equipment familiarization
- Cargo handling procedures
- Accident reporting procedures
- Handling of emergency procedures
- Night driving
- Vehicle inspection process
- Driving in congested urban conditions

## Vehicle Maintenance Records

The maintenance files should contain the following:

- Pre-trip inspections
- Vehicle defect reports
- Service schedules and records
- Major repair records
- Satisfactory tire control program
- Fuel and oil records

The following items should be checked regularly on power units:

- Mirrors
- Horn
- Windshields/windows
- Reflectors
- Flaps
- Fifth wheel assembly
- Exhaust system
- Defrosters
- Transmission
- Clutch
- Steering system
- Drive shaft
- Draw bar assembly
- Tires/rims/wheels

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- Lights
- Signals
- Air and electrical connections
- Emergency equipment
- Battery
- Fuel system/tank
- Suspension system
- Instruments and gauges
- Brakes/components
- Coupling devices
- Cargo securement
- Frame/body
- Hoses and connections
- Engine
- Paperwork

Regularly checked trailer items should include:

- Electrical and air connections
- Headboard
- Landing gear
- Body lights
- Tires
- Brake drums
- Wheels and lugs
- Reflectors
- Stop and tail lights
- Frame and cross members
- Springs and U-bolts
- Electronic wiring
- Floor/sides
- Air hoses
- Brake linings
- Brake rods and diaphragms
- Slack adjusters
- Wheel oil level

## Driver Disciplinary Measures/ Enforcement of Policy

- How are drivers held "accountable" for following company safety policies?
- How often are motor vehicle records reviewed?
- Are motor vehicle violations assessed based on the "seriousness" or weight of the violation?
- Which violations will result in immediate termination, suspension, probation, etc.?
- Who within the company is responsible for driver disciplinary procedures and does this person have the full support of "management"?
- Is there a "Driver Review Board" to review driver conduct and issue disciplinary recommendations?
- Is expected driver conduct clearly outlined in the Company Fleet Policy?
- Do drivers have the freedom to select routes and make other operational decisions or does management assume these responsibilities?

## Accident Investigation and Review

Accident investigation files should include the following:

- Written notes of the investigation
- A review to determine preventability
- Notes of driver review board (chargeable or non-chargeable)
- Notes of any driver discipline
- Corrective action taken by management.

## On-Scene Accident Procedures/ Driver Conduct

1. Do your drivers know how they should report an accident, whether serious or minor?
2. Are drivers trained on how to conduct themselves on an accident scene? Do they know what to say and NOT to say? Do they know how to handle disgruntled "claimants," law enforcement officials, attorneys who arrive on the scene, etc.?
3. Are your drivers properly trained in on-accident investigation procedures? Are they properly equipped?

Attorneys commonly subpoena four documents:

1. The driver's file will be reviewed to confirm the driver hiring process was thorough and followed "industry guidelines." They will also review the orientation/training process to confirm the driver was well prepared to handle his/her job tasks safely.

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- 2. Vehicle maintenance files will be closely reviewed to confirm the vehicle involved in the accident was inspected and maintained properly.
- 3. The company Fleet Safety Policy or Driver’s Manual will be examined to determine the extent company safety rules and driver disciplinary procedures.
- 4. Accident investigation files will be reviewed to identify any accident trends involving company drivers and confirm whether company management responded properly to loss trends.

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