



Driver Safety Programs: It's Not Just For Your Truck Drivers

Drivers are an integral part many businesses. A lot of attention is given to truck driver safety, and rightfully so. Drivers are driving trucks and tanker trailers on interstate highways and your local community streets. Their safety and regulatory compliance therefore is important to maintaining a company's good reputation.



While the actual act of driving is the source of a driver's livelihood — it is what they are paid to do — not all drivers within a company are professional truck drivers.

Members of a sales force, for instance, probably log a considerable amount of mileage each year. They are paid to generate sales and maintain good customer relations. While driving is an integral part of a salesperson's day, most salespeople probably do not view themselves as company drivers. Neither does management. Thus salespeople are often left out of company driver safety programs.

RISK EXPOSURES:

– *Driver Distractions.* Salespeople are more apt to be interrupted by incoming cell phone calls while driving. They also are likely to make phone calls

and check personal digital assistants (PDA's) while driving. Typically, younger salespeople (those in their twenties, i.e., Gen-Y) are prone to such distractions. However, older drivers are definitely not immune to such modern technology distractions. There are even reports of increasing use of text messaging while driving. Since salespersons are often rushing to their next appointment, meals and snacks eaten while driving are often a cause of distraction, especially if drinks are spilled. Salespersons may also be driving clients; any increase in the number of passengers is a potential cause for distraction.

- *Company Expectations.* Either direct or indirect, company management expectations for their salespersons may unknowingly put them at risk. Early morning or late afternoon appointments in conjunction with a fully booked day of visits may lead to fatigue and subsequent inattentiveness. Certain schedules and appointment times may lead to stress if the salesperson needs to deal with traffic, inclement weather, and family obligations.
- *Poor Skills.* Salespersons out of the office all day are not in visual contact with management which does not give management adequate insight into a sales team's driving capabilities — even though the team is driving all over on behalf of the company. Salespeople have different skill sets. Typically, job interviews for a salesperson do not focus on driving skills and habits. That could mean that even the best salesperson may be a chronically poor driver, with bad habits such as speeding, reckless driving, tailgating, and ignoring school bus signals and school zone

warnings. They are, however, in frequent contact with clients often entertaining them, and therefore, it is important to know how the sales team handles drinking and driving.

- *Poor Vehicle Maintenance.* This risk exposure may vary if a salesperson uses a company-owned/leased vehicle, or uses his or her own personal vehicle for company business. A sound maintenance program is needed to keep a vehicle in safe operating condition. If the salesperson is solely responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of their vehicle, there may be instances where some individuals are less organized than others at assuring that vehicles are regularly maintained. Critical factors include tire pressure and condition, brakes, and steering mechanisms.
- *Personal Use of Company Owned/Leased Vehicles.* Company owned vehicles taken home by employees are exposed to a variety of risk exposures, including use by teenage drivers, spouses, family outings/vacations, late accident reporting (when use is over weekends), towing boats, etc. It is important to have an established policy regarding off-hours use of a company-owned vehicle.
- *Driver Owned/Leased Vehicles Used for Business Purposes.* Many of the same risk exposures are equally applicable regardless of who owns the vehicle. An unmanaged risk would entail having a salesperson drive a vehicle which is not adequately insured. A company also does not have direct control over the maintenance of the vehicle; however, you can have a policy which requires employees to maintain their vehicles in accordance with manufacturer recommendations.

RISK REDUCTION:

Companies can manage the aforementioned risk exposures through clear and unambiguous written company policies and procedures, demon-

strated management support, constant supervisory oversight, regular and consistent training, and a supportive culture where employees help each other.

Effective verbal and written communication is a key theme applicable to managing risks. While it is important to establish written parameters for employees to follow, it is more important to establish a work environment where safety policies and procedures are readily implemented. Bottom line: Salespeople need to fully understand the safe driving expectations while on company business. Furthermore, salespeople given company cars need to fully understand their responsibilities for the vehicle and how it should be used. This is achieved through written SOPs and reinforcement through effective supervision and regular training.

- *Driver Distractions.* While controlling the risk from driver distractions may seem obvious, it is important to let your sales team know that a moment of inattentiveness or a distraction can result in an accident which may have otherwise been avoided. Cell phones, PDA's, laptops, and other devices should not be used while driving unless there is an absolute emergency. Salespeople should avoid eating or drinking while driving; have necessary items such as sunglasses, toll change, etc. easily reachable; and make seat and mirror adjustments prior to driving.



- *Company Expectations.* Make sure your salespeople know that company management cares about their well being and safety. While any job can create some level of “reasonable” stress, a salesperson’s travel schedule should not induce any extra level of undue stress. Fatigue can negatively affect a person’s driving

abilities, as can stress at home or other personal and/or family commitments and obligations. Severe weather places a driver at extra risk, as do special conditions such as sun glare, fog, and black ice. Bottom line: Do not place onerous travel demands on your salespeople. Clearly communicate (and demonstrate) that their safety is of the utmost concern.

- *Poor Skills or Wrongful Activities.* Controlling these exposures ties into other company policies. To prevent instances of drinking and driving, companies are wise to establish a controlled substances and alcohol abuse policy applicable to all employees. Many risk exposures can be mitigated prior to hiring employees. Preventing potential problem



employees from joining the company is the first step in controlling many risks. Consider checking the background of applicants, including State Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) checks, previous employer reference checks, and possibly criminal record checks

(depending on the nature of your business and the types of clients you have). A company should have clear criteria which results in the disqualification of an applicant such as the number and nature of moving violations, prior license suspension, number of accidents, etc. A pre-hire physical examination with a drug screen may also be helpful. Once hired, MVRs should be looked at annually, and all drivers should be offered regular defensive driving training. Even simple rules, such as wearing your seat belts, turning headlights on when it rains, etc., should be stated and reinforced. Bottom line: Know who you are hiring and make sure employees can work within the expectations of company policy.

- *Poor Vehicle Maintenance.* Company policy should be very clear and concise on who is responsible for vehicle care and maintenance. A vehicle care and maintenance schedule should be made available to all drivers to assure the safe operation of the vehicle. Maintain a written record of maintenance operations. Drivers should be trained and reminded what to do in case of a mechanical problem while traveling. Drivers should know what to do and who to call. Emergency travel packs should accompany vehicles and include items such as emergency warning devices, flashlights, etc. Bottom line: Your drivers should not be driving unsafe vehicles.

- *Personal Use of Company Owned/Leased Vehicles.* Company expectations of personal use should be crystal clear. Decisions need to be made on who are the authorized drivers of a company vehicle. Are certain categories of people, such as non-employees, teenage children, spouses excluded? What is the intended use of the vehicle? Can vehicles be used for extended, non-business trips, such as family vacations? Be clear what the consequences are for not following established policies and procedures.

- *Driver Owned/Leased Vehicles Used for Business Purposes.* You need to determine what level of personal insurance is required for drivers using their own vehicles for business. Typically, \$500,000 in combined single limits is recommended. Specific insurance requirements need to be written and clearly communicated. Employees need to provide certificates of insurance demonstrating current and adequate placement of insurance coverage. Similarly, personal vehicle maintenance requirements need to be written and communicated to your drivers. Other risk reduction steps are the same for having a salesperson drive a company owned vehicle.

Safe driving controls are not just applicable to truck drivers. Other employees who drive on company business, such as salespersons, managers, technicians, etc., are exposed to a variety of risk exposures. Not managing these risks is costly to a company, not only in terms of money, but also in terms of employee morale, company reputation, and community standing. Investing time into managing your risks will provide your company with positive dividends, and more importantly a safe and motivated workforce.

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