How to Implement a Fleet Safety Program



Safety Management Tools – Transportation

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If your company has vehicles—whether in the hundreds or just a single van or pickup truck—you are at risk. At stake is not just safety and liability for property damage and personal injury, but your company's reputation. After all, even if you don't have an accident, people in your community might think twice about doing business with your company if they see one of your vehicles being driven unsafely. One of the keys to managing these risks is to implement a comprehensive fleet safety program. This requires less effort than you might think.

The Components of a Fleet Safety Program

There are two basic approaches to implementing a program. One is to find a workable model and adapt it to the needs of your organization. Your insurance carrier may have a model you can use. The alternative is to build your own program from scratch. Whichever route you go, there are some key components your program should contain:

- Driver selection criteria.
- Company expectations of drivers.
- Responsibilities of drivers and supervisors.
- Driver orientation and training.
- Disciplinary action for inappropriate operation of a motor vehicle.

Driver Record Checks

This is a critical portion of the fleet safety program. You must check the driving record of every employee who drives or may drive a company owned or leased motor vehicle. You should conduct driver record checks:

- When checking job application references;
- Before making an offer of employment;
- When a current employee transfers to a driving position;
- When a current position is revised to include driving;

- At least once a year on a regular basis to ensure the ongoing quality of your fleet.

Most state motor vehicle departments will provide driver record checks to employers, for a nominal fee. You may also be able to negotiate with your fleet insurance carrier to do the checks for you as part of your premium costs.

A third option is to spend some extra money to hire an outside company to perform the check. The information provided by such companies is not always as current or accurate as that provided by state motor vehicle departments. Also, since the reports generated by the private company are covered under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), employees must sign a disclosure and release form authorizing the check. You don't need FCRA authorization to get this information directly from the state.

Assessing the Results

With a formal fleet safety program, you can use drivers' records to select safe drivers to hire. True, a person may have a good record and still not be a stellar driver, just someone who hasn't been caught yet. But this is usually not the case.

Once you've hired employees, you can use the program to monitor their driving and identify areas for improvement and, if necessary, impose disciplinary action. In either case, here are some suggested criteria for assessing the results of drivers' records checks.

Acceptable: In general, an acceptable candidate may have these moving violations:

- No more than two in the past 12 months;
- No more than three in the past 24 months; or
- No more than four in the past 36 months.

Probationary Status: Candidates may be hired on a probationary status, with their records re-checked every four to six months, if their records show one incident in the past 12 months of:

- Excessive speed;
- An at-fault accident; or
- An accident involving lane, following, sign or signal violations.

Unacceptable: Candidates with two or more of the above violations should not be hired into a position requiring the operation of a motor vehicle. Nor should any candidate whose record shows one or more of the following in the past 12 months:

- Operating under the influence of alcohol/controlled substance
- Fleeing and eluding
- Hit and run
- Leaving the scene of an accident
- Personal injury/fatal at-fault accident
- Reckless driving
- Driving without a license

There are other violations or circumstances that may prevent hiring or place the

current employee into a probationary status.

When determining eligibility, remember to consider extenuating circumstances. For example, a temporary suspension for failure to pay forfeiture probably would not affect a candidate's eligibility – but driving on that suspended license might.

One last note about selection criteria: Candidates under 25 years of age should be scrutinized carefully. Restrict drivers in this age group to no more than ten percent of the total number of drivers in your fleet. Drivers younger than 18 years of age should not be hired at all.

Defensive Driving & Other Education

Let's now discuss the second component of a fleet safety program: driver training, orientation, and company expectations. Each driver in your fleet should take a safe driving course within six months of being hired or immediately on the implementation of the fleet safety program. The course can be:

- One of the numerous driving courses available, including the National Safety Council Defensive Driving course;
- A program you develop in-house; or
- A program offered by or through your fleet insurance carrier. Often insurance companies outsource the driver training to other companies that will provide the training in a classroom setting or online.

After initial training, drivers should receive periodic brief refreshers which may include:

- Short discussions
- Memos
- Payroll stuffers
- Newsletter articles

Drivers able to complete a defensive driving course or similar class may be exempt from the initial training, but still should participate in the refreshers. Be sure to document the training and all refreshers.

Vehicle Orientation

Employees must be familiar with the vehicle(s) they will be operating. The orientation to the vehicle should include any of its unique characteristics and features, such as:

- Anti-lock brakes;
- Remote control mirrors;
- Seatbelt and head restraint adjustments; and
- Anti-theft devices.

Vehicles with diesel engines also have unique characteristics. You should also point out the location of the SDS binder.

Orientations should be provided to:

- Any employee who's assigned to a different vehicle; and

- All employees whenever new vehicles are added to the fleet.

Company Expectations

Of course, you expect your drivers to handle their vehicles safely. But to be clear, your fleet safety program should outline these expectations. Your drivers should understand that you expect them to:

- **Conduct regular vehicle safety inspections** per department policy, keep the vehicle in good operating condition, and report any mechanical or equipment problems to their supervisor.
- **Practice defensive driving** and courtesy to prevent accidents and traffic violations.
- **Observe all the rules of the road,** including the use of turn signals, yielding the right of way, adhering to speed limits and maintaining safe following distance.
- **Use headlights** (not parking lights) during times of reduced visibility, such as snow, rain, drizzle, fog and twilight.
- **Allow only authorized persons** to operate or ride in vehicles.
- **Never use the vehicles for personal use** (e.g., hauling furniture, driving children to school, shopping, etc.)
- **Never pick up hitchhikers.**
- **Never leave the vehicle unattended** with the key in the ignition and/or the motor running.
- **Always lock the vehicle** when it is unattended.
- **Use seatbelts** at all times and ensure that passengers do so as well.
- **Report to the supervisor** immediately any moving violations, accidents or changes in license status.
- **Never drive under the influence** of alcohol or drugs. If medication is prescribed, the doctor or pharmacist should confirm that it will not affect the ability to drive. The same is true of over-the-counter medications, such as cold remedies containing antihistamine, which can cause drowsiness.
- **Avoid using a cell phone** while driving. If it is necessary to use the phone, pull safely off the road, make the call, and then safely resume driving. Hands-free devices have limited value in reducing the distractions associated with phone use while driving.
- **Review and be familiar with** the safety data sheets (SDS) provided in the vehicle for all chemicals present including fuel, lubricants, coolant, brake and power steering fluid, windshield washer fluid, transmission fluid, and battery acid along with any de-icing and cleaning products kept in the vehicle.

Supervisor Obligations

Let’s discuss the supervisor’s obligations in a fleet safety program. Supervisors play an essential role in carrying out a fleet safety program work. For a program to work, supervisors must:

- Ensure employees are familiar with and adhere to all aspects of the fleet safety program.
- Maintain a list of all current drivers and their drivers license numbers.
- Conduct an annual review of all drivers’ records.
- Familiarize employees with new vehicles and ensure they understand and are aware of any unique features of the vehicles.

- Investigate accidents involving department vehicles.
- Ensure employees attend all require driver education programs, including refreshers.

Disciplinary and Other Policies

You must have a disciplinary policy to take action against employees who commit violations of the fleet safety program. Where applicable, other policies may have bearing on the situation. These may include policies on:

- Drug and alcohol use
- Motor vehicle accidents, or
- Unacceptable driving records.

You may also want to consider including a provision in your disciplinary policy that requires employees who commit violations to attend a course designed to improve individual driving skills. Of course, this should be only used for violations and employees that don't warrant immediate termination.

Policies Regarding Personal Vehicles

A policy should also address employee use of personal vehicles. Generally, employees should not use their personal vehicles to do company business if there is a motor vehicle available in operating condition that isn't being used. But occasionally, employees may have to use their personal vehicles to perform their duties. To reduce the potential for accidents, injuries and liability, employees should follow the same practices as outlined for the operation of company-owned vehicles. In addition, your program should outline these particulars:

Insurance: Employees who expect to drive their personal vehicles for company business must show they have automobile insurance in force. They should maintain at least the state-mandated minimum liability coverage but should be urged to carry a higher liability level along with collision and comprehensive coverage.

Accidents: In the event of an accident involving an employee's personal vehicle, the employee should:

- Follow their insurance carrier's procedures for reporting the accident and obtaining information;
- File an Incident Report with the supervisor, and
- If injured, file an Employee Injury Report according to the company's policy.

Mileage claims: Your plan should address whether employees are to claim mileage from their federal income taxes or to be reimbursed by the employer at the prevailing IRS rate. Thus deductibles and claims for vehicle damage that are not covered by the employee's insurance policy are the responsibility of the employee. The thought here is that the mileage deduction/allowance is intended to cover most if not all expenses involved in the operation of an automobile. Any exceptions may be considered on a case-by-case basis and should be careful not to set a precedent.

Conclusion

Employees who operate a motor vehicle for your company should be seen not only

as a driver but also as a company representative. Therefore, employees must make a conscious effort to drive courteously, maintain alertness and obey all traffic laws and rules of the road. Making sure they do will help your drivers stay safe and enhance the image of your organization.