Truck Driving Meeting Kit



Truck Driving: Hazards On and Off the Road Safety Talk

Transporting goods and materials by truck is a huge business. It is estimated that there are more than 3.5 million truck drivers in the United States according to the American Trucking Association. The employees in this occupation experience many injuries and illnesses on the job. It is important to focus on not only the hazards faced while driving, but the other hazards associated with this occupation as well.

TRUCK DRIVING DANGERS

There are more fatalities experienced in truck driving than in many other industries. Many truck drivers lost their lives on the job and over 65,000 drivers suffered injuries that required days away from work. The causes for the days away from work cases for tractor trailer drivers are:

- Overexertion and bodily reaction (35%)
- Slips, trips, falls (30%)
- Contact with other object or equipment (17%)
- Transportation related injuries (14%)

The injuries suffered by drivers of delivery trucks experienced a similar percentage of the same injuries as the tractor trailer operators.

BIGGEST HAZARDS IN TRUCKING

The biggest hazards for truckers can be sorted into 3 broad categories:

Truck accidents. Compared to the average driver, truckers are actually safer on the road. This is partly because there are strict state and federal regulations that govern how long a trucker can drive, how frequently trucks must undergo maintenance, and even how fast trucks can travel. Additionally, commercial trucks can weigh up to 80,000 pounds, and their massive size helps truckers stay safe in an accident with another vehicle. However, large trucks are particularly prone to rollover accidents, jackknife accidents, and tire blowout accidents.

Loading and unloading injuries. A trucker’s job often involves lifting heavy objects, which, if not done properly, can result in serious back injuries, head

injuries, knee sprains, and musculoskeletal disorders. When loading or unloading cargo from a trailer, truck drivers should use appropriate safety gear and ask for help from others when needed. Mechanical aids and forklifts should be provided by the company to assist with heavy loads.

Chronic stress injuries. After a trucker has driven for a while, they may start to develop chronic neck or back pain from sitting for long periods of time. Similarly, truckers may develop wrist and shoulder pain from steering. Truckers can help prevent these repetitive stress injuries by maintaining good physical health, taking frequent rests, and stretching.

COMMON TRUCKER INJURIES

As a result of all the different ways a truck driver can be injured (from unloading cargo to falls to highway accidents), the injuries vary considerably and include:

- Neck and back injuries
- Broken bones
- Head injuries
- Traumatic brain injuries
- Burn injuries
- Internal injuries
- Lacerations
- Spinal cord injuries and paralysis
- Death

BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKERS AVOIDING INJURIES

While there are many variables you can control on the road as well as while unloading equipment or materials as a driver, there are many variables that are outside of your full control such as other drivers and weather conditions. It is important to account for these different hazards and make choices that help mitigate them. Some safeguards and best practices for job tasks outside the cab are:

Take care of your physical shape and health. Due to the nature of the job, many truck drivers do not get enough physical activity which puts them at a risk for injury when unloading materials.

Stretch or do some kind of warm up before engaging in heavy physical lifting. You put your body at risk for injury when you overexert after long periods of rest. Ask for help when lifting awkward or heavy loads.

Take note of the conditions of your walking surfaces as well as in or on your trailer. Wear proper footwear that is slip resistant and supports your ankles. Safety toe boots will also protect your feet in case of a dropped object.

Park in areas away from traffic when unloading. There are many times when truck drivers are struck by other drivers. Wear a reflective orange vest as well anytime you are outside of your truck in an area where traffic is present.

FINAL WORD

While many fatalities and injuries are caused while actually driving a truck, many injuries occur outside the cab as well. Controlling the hazards that you are able to control and making informed decisions to mitigate those hazards outside of your control can help to ensure you go home healthy. Evaluate what risks you are taking next time you are unloading equipment or materials.