Creating A Safety-Conscious Culture Where The Rubber Meets The Road

Insights

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Traffic accidents are the number one killer of employees in the United States. There is a vehicle crash every 2.5 seconds, a vehicle-related injury every 19 seconds, and a vehicle-related fatality every 11 minutes. According to the most recent data available, more than 32,000 people died and an additional 2.3 million people were injured in traffic accidents in 2014 alone.

Because many of these injuries and fatalities occurred during the workday, it comes as little surprise that driving is one of the most hazardous tasks that your employees perform.

The High Cost Of Accidents

The cost of accidents to employers is sky high, regardless of whether they occur on or off the job. It is estimated that the annual total economic cost to employers is around $250 billion, over $60 billion of which is attributed to the lost productivity of injured workers.

These costs include medical treatment, legal expenses, property damage, and increased premiums for workers' compensation, health, and disability insurance. Employers also have to factor in loss of property, financial exposure to third-party litigation, and even reputational injury. Although the average accident can cost an employer $15,000 to $20,000, that amount increases to more than $65,000 when an injury is involved, and will usually exceed $500,000 when there is a fatality.

The Leading Cause Of Accidents

Distracted driving continues to be the number one cause of crashes in the United States. Talking on the phone, eating, texting, and checking email are just a few of the ways that employees get distracted behind the wheel. These kinds of behaviors result in poor driving performance, which accounts for nearly 50% of all accidents. In fact, drivers using devices like cell phones are four times more likely to be involved in injury crashes.

Setting Up A Driver Safety Program

While you cannot absolutely control your employees' behavior out on the road, you can adopt risk management practices that promote driver safety. Implementing a driver safety program can be one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to reduce vehicle-related injuries to employees, protect human and financial resources, and defend against legal liability caused by accidents involving company vehicles or company business.

There is a public relations bonus as well – a safety program demonstrates to employees and the greater community alike that you care about the health and wellbeing of others. Employers that have established such programs have achieved many great successes, including increased seatbelt usage rates, decreased number of crashes, and reduced overall vehicle costs. Many employers have even reported receiving a return-on-investment of $3.00 or more for every $1.00 spent on these kinds of safety programs.

The cornerstone of any driver safety program is creating a safety-conscious culture where safe driving is expected, supported, and rewarded. This often requires employees to change attitudes, improve behavior, and increase skills.

The 10-Step Program
The Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) recommends a 10-Step Program for the creation and implementation of a safe-driving policy. Employers that have adhered to the 10-Step Program have experienced significant improvements in traffic safety performance, minimized risk of accidents, and even lower insurance costs.

1. Senior management commitment and employee involvement. Senior management buy-in is vital to creating a safety-conscious culture. These are the individuals who will provide leadership, set company policies, and allocate resources towards the creation of a safe workplace. It is also essential that employees are involved in planning the driver safety program.

2. Written policies and procedures. You should set written policies that emphasize your commitment to safe driving, clearly communicated to employees and unswervingly enforced. As they are part of the foundation of any safe-driving program, you should consider offering employees rewards for following the rules and certainly impose consequences when broken.

3. Driver agreements. Consider requiring employees who drive on company business to sign an agreement acknowledging and agreeing to abide by the safe-driving program. This will ensure that employees understand the policies and expectations regarding driving.

4. Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) checks. Conduct MVR checks for all employees who drive on company business in order to eliminate poor drivers. Consider updating the MVR checks periodically to ensure they maintain good driving habits or to identify any need for driver-safety training.

5. Crash reporting and investigation. Put in place a process for reporting crashes and investigating them. You need to understand the root cause of crashes to determine whether they were preventable and to eliminate them from occurring down the road.

6. Vehicle selection, maintenance, and inspection. Take care when selecting, maintaining, and inspecting company vehicles. Review the safety features of all vehicles under consideration and opt

for those that are "best-in-class" in crash tests and overall safety. Additionally, make sure that these vehicles are on a routine preventative maintenance schedule.

7. Disciplinary action system. Just like other violations of company policy, establish a progressive discipline system that provides for specific disciplinary actions as a result of traffic violations or crashes. This system will also enable you to track whether your drivers are developing a pattern of bad driving habits.

8. Reward/incentive program. Where employees drive safely, it shows in the bottom line. Reward such positive results through recognition, bonuses, special privileges, or other incentives. The goal is to keep employees motivated and driving safely.

9. Driver training/communication. Continually provide driver-safety training and communicate with employees about safe driving. All drivers, even the best ones, benefit from routine training about driver safety and driving skills.

10. Regulatory compliance. Finally, be cognizant of any local, state, and federal laws that regulate company vehicles or employees who drive on company business.

Why Are You Waiting?
Most traffic accidents are preventable. Because of the high cost of crashes to employers each year, there is no reason to ignore the poor driving behaviors of your employees. Also, there is certainly no excuse for not implementing a driver-safety program.

The benefits of creating a culture where safe driving is expected, supported, and rewarded are tangible, and when done properly, can be quite significant. This is an opportunity to protect human and financial resources, so why are you waiting?

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Workplace Safety and Catastrophe Management