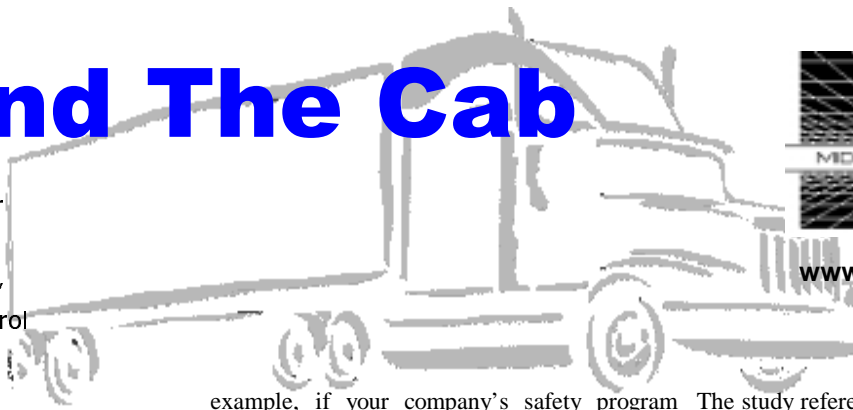


Beyond The Cab

The only safety management newsletter dedicated exclusively to addressing injury prevention and workers' compensation cost control for trucking companies.



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Vol. 2, Issue 3

Best Practices

There are certainly some trucking companies that are more effective at preventing work-related injuries than others. What makes them different? Is it luck? Certainly, luck may be an explanation for a trucking company sustaining no (or very few) work-related injuries over a short period. But "luck" is much less of a feasible explanation the longer that the company sustains a "good" loss history. Companies that continue (year after year) to have far fewer work-related injuries than is customary for their industry, are very likely doing something right.

Several years ago, an insurance industry study was conducted of trucking companies. The study looked at the trucking companies within the sample that had the most favorable loss records. These were the companies whose workers' compensation claims were continually far fewer and less costly than the industry average. Through identifying the traits that the safety programs had in common, the study identified 10 "best practices" that companies with less effective injury prevention efforts should adopt. This issue of *Beyond the Cab* addresses the top 4 of them.

Have written safety programs that deal with injury prevention which include detailed safe work practices.

This seemingly simple statement includes some terms that deserve to some elaboration. First, what is a "safety program?" It's not merely a document that includes the company's policies relative to safety. A "safety program" is a planned approach to reducing hazards and eliminating injuries. Second, what is implied by the terminology "injury prevention?" Since the overwhelming majority of injuries in the trucking industry are non-driving injuries, an effective safety program must direct commensurate effort toward preventing non-driving injuries. And what about that last set of words, "safe work practices?" This implies that there are specific methods for performing routine tasks that are safe (or are at least safer than alternative methods). An effective safety program should describe in clear and concise language how to perform those tasks safely. For

example, if your company's safety program does not include safe work practices for such routine tasks as cranking landing gear, exiting the cab of trucks, and sliding tandems, it is very likely lacking in that respect.

Have a strong disciplinary process that is both written and strictly followed.

Within the context of a safety program, "discipline" is not synonymous with "punishment." Instead, the disciplinary process within a safety program is much broader. It lets employees know what's expected of them in relation to the goals of the safety program. It reinforces previously conducted safety training. It lays out the actions that will be taken if individuals do not meet the company's expectations. It is a means of identifying specific employees of whom additional training is warranted. And, through the desire of individuals to avoid negative consequences, it encourages the desirable (safe) behaviors. Despite the many different and beneficial attributes of a disciplinary process, few of these benefits are realized if the process is not effectively communicated, strictly followed and uniformly applied to all employees.

Employers should be aware that, with few exceptions, work-related injuries are compensable workers' compensation claims, regardless of whether the claimant broke a company safety rule or not. However, many states at least permit a reduction in workers' compensation benefits when the injury resulted from the claimant's disregard of a company safety rule.

Have a safety incentive program that rewards safe behavior or the absence of on-the-job injuries.

It's far easier to find a trucking company that has a safety incentive program than it is to find a company that doesn't. However, a trait that is common to many trucking company safety incentive programs is that they fail to provide an incentive for the reduction of on-the-job injuries. Instead, the incentive programs focus on compliance with state traffic laws and DOT regulations; the prevention of cargo damage and equipment damage; and the absence of traffic accidents.

The study referenced above determined that the companies with the best workers' compensation claims history not only have safety incentive programs, but that those incentive programs reward safe behavior and/or the absence of work-related injuries. The easiest way to do this is to simply consider achieving a company-wide claims reduction goal as criteria to receive an incentive award. However, it is ultimately more effective to reward safe behavior than it is to reward the absence of claims.

Have a systematic safety training program that includes extensive new-hire training and continued training on a regular basis.

Clearly, "training" is a key ingredient for every effective safety program. But what is "training?" Children in school don't receive training. Instead, they receive education. Conversely, our armed forces go through "basic training," not "basic education." There's a clear difference between "education" and "training." However, what frequently passes for "safety training" is not training at all. To further illustrate the difference, compare the terms "driver education" and "driver training." There is a clear distinction, and that distinction is that training involves the hands-on involvement of the trainee. With that in mind, what safety "training" is being conducted in your company?

Additionally, the content of the safety training must be considered. Training aimed at reducing driver injuries should address the most prevalent types of injuries in the trucking industry, the injuries that have occurred in your company in recent years and other identified hazards.

Lastly, the extent to which new employees receive training should be assessed. Extensive new hire training is not only intended to counter the statistical likelihood that newer employees will be injured on-the-job more frequently than others, but it's also the means by which a company conveys the true value that they place upon driver safety. When it comes to safety, is your company conveying the message to new drivers that compliance, cargo, equipment or the personal safety of the driver is the highest priority of the company? There's only one chance to make a first impression (and a lasting impact) upon a new employee.