

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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More "Best Practices"

Trucking companies that have fewer than average workers' compensation claims year after year are very likely succeeding based upon their intentional safety management strategies, as opposed to luck. The previous issue of "Beyond the Cab" referenced an insurance industry study that identified 10 of these strategies (best practices), and addressed four of those strategies. This issue of "Beyond the Cab" addresses the remaining 6 best practices.

Review driver logs and hold drivers strictly accountable for violations of hours of service regulations.

Although motor vehicle accidents are the cause of only a fraction of the injuries sustained by truck drivers, fatigue is likely a factor in more of these accidents than we are aware. The review of logs should not be done only with the goal of avoiding regulatory penalties, but should perhaps be even more vigilant with respect to identifying and combating driver fatigue.

Have a shoe policy

Whether on a level surface, on the steps of a tractor or standing on a tractor's tire to clean a windshield, a significant percentage of driver injuries result from falls. It is essential to have good traction between shoes and the surface with which they come into contact. Because drivers are very frequently walking on surfaces over which neither you nor they have control (such as truck stops and customers' docks) the only effective means of improving traction in many situations is to influence the degree of traction provided by the footwear that the drivers wear. A company shoe policy is the means to that end. However, traction is not the only consideration that should be considered when developing a shoe policy. Footwear for drivers should be able to be snugly laced above the ankle to provide additional support. Furthermore, some footwear has additional features, such as oil-resistant soles. Individual companies should check with several industrial footwear suppliers to identify the most appropriate footwear characteristics, as well as the availability of a payroll deduction program for purchasing footwear.

Have a return-to-work program

Although implementing a return-to-work (modified duty) program within a trucking company can be a challenging task, the benefits far outweigh the hassle. Probably the benefit that attracts most employers to return-to-work programs (at least initially) is that return-to-work programs very frequently have the effect of lowering the workers' compensation premium. However that is far from the only benefit. Return-to-work programs help employees return to their regular (full duty) job more quickly and enable the employer to ensure that the physician's restrictions are being followed. Furthermore, return-to-work programs send the message that workers' compensation is not a source for a "paid vacation" and helps to weed-out employees who want to "milk" the workers' compensation system. Although finding (or creating) temporary assignments for employees can be difficult in some trucking companies (particularly smaller ones), many trucking companies have used drivers who were temporarily unable to drive, to perform tasks such as file paperwork, review driver logs, conduct driver training or serve as a night watchman.

Have a formal accident investigation process that goes beyond state requirements and insurance reporting needs

DOT, OSHA, and insurance companies each have requirements for investigating and documenting work-related injuries. This should be viewed as the *starting point* of an accident investigation. Perhaps the most glaring flaw in the accident investigation process within many trucking companies is that the circumstances surrounding the incident are only conveyed verbally. Instead, what should be happening following a work-related injury is that the injured driver should (upon return to the company facility) physically demonstrate what happened, to the extent that it can be done safely. An immeasurably better understanding of the incident is achieved in this manner.

Additionally, in attempting to determine the root cause of the incident, management's role should not be overlooked or avoided. Could inadequate or ineffective training be the root cause of any injuries within your company?

Suggestions for preventing similar incidents should be determined solely by management, but should be solicited from the injured driver (and from other drivers).

Furthermore, there should always be a means for ensuring that the preventative measures are actually enacted.

Train drivers how to enter and exit a tractor properly

Although having a systematic safety training program was listed in the previous issue as one of the "best practices" for preventing driver injuries. The above-referenced study specifically addressed training relative to entering and exiting tractors. Obviously, this is a key component of safety training. Remember, as expressed in the previous issue... "training" and "education" are not the same. "Training" is not conducted through throwing in a video for the drivers, or even by standing in front of a group of drivers and *telling* them how it should be done. Training is *hands-on*. Consider how much more of an impact would it make on a driver he was expected to do more than simply attend and stay awake through safety meetings.

Have a method of assessing and measuring the success of your efforts

Unfortunately, every well-intentioned thing that is done to reduce injuries and control related costs will not achieve the desired results. It is foolishness to continue to dedicate time and resources to any part of a safety program that is ineffective. However, to determine the effectiveness of the safety program as a whole, or any of its components, there need to be some means by which to measure the success of your efforts. Some of the means that should be used to make this evaluation are to review the claims history of the company and make comparisons to the claims history of previous year(s) or to predetermined goals; and to solicit input from drivers.