

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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The Winds of Change

Now that 2004 is nothing more than another wrinkle on your forehead, and the new year is still so recent that you can't get into the habit of writing 2005 yet, it's an opportune time to make some changes.

What are you going to do differently in 2005 to improve your company's safety program? What innovative methods can you use to keep the safety message fresh in the minds of your drivers? What are you going to do differently to guard against drivers becoming complacent about your safety program and about personal safety as well?

If your plan for 2005 is to maintain status quo in your safety program, there is a very strong probability that you are making a mistake. Yes even if you went through 2004 (or even a few years) with no injuries change is likely necessary. Many companies go for long stretches of time with no workers' compensation claims, largely as a result of luck. After all, unless you've purposefully evaluated the effectiveness of what you are doing within your safety program, can you really point to it as the cause of the success that you've enjoyed?

Doing the same thing within your safety program year after year after year, breeds complacency. If you listen closely you may even be able to hear the audible moans of long-term drivers who are about to sit through another safety video that they've seen 6 times before.

When drivers get complacent about your company's safety program, there is very little mental distance for them to travel before they become complacent about their personal safety.

Complacency is the sworn enemy of safety. *(Remember that statement. It is worth the cost of this free newsletter).*

Again, complacency is the sworn enemy of safety. Personal injuries are not often the result of apathy. After all, you wouldn't expect to hear a driver say, "I think I'm going to fall while I'm getting out of my truck today." Similarly, carelessness or flaws in the personality of drivers are not often the cause of personal injuries. More often than not, injuries sustained by drivers at work are a result of complacency.

When we think about complacency we look at it as an undesirable trait; like a flaw in our character like ignorance or laziness. The truth is that we are all complacent. The brain is designed to automate repetitive behavior, and drivers have plenty of repetitive behavior built into their job.

We are all wired to be that way. Psychologists estimate that as much as 90% of our day-to-day behavior goes on without conscious or deliberate thought. Repetitive tasks become automated to free up our attention for things that are new, novel or threatening. If it wasn't that way we'd be overwhelmed with the simplest of tasks. So instead, we notice and respond to what is unique, unusual or hazardous. However, repeated exposure to situations, even if they are hazardous, dulls our awareness.

People exposed repeatedly to high places reduce their fear of heights. People afraid of public speaking get more comfortable in front of an audience after repeated exposure. Likewise, people who are

repeatedly exposed to hazardous situations become less concerned about those hazards and the cautious associated with them.

This is such a reality of human existence that psychologists have tagged it with a name. It's called "habituation."

Unfortunately for safety directors in industries such as trucking, in which there's a considerable amount of routine tasks, habituation occurs and breeds complacency. Drivers are repeatedly exposed to the same hazards but are not injured. Over time the absence of negative consequences causes them to become more complacent about our personal safety, even though they possess the knowledge of what we should be doing.

As safety professionals within the trucking industry, it is up to you to keep your safety program fresh, new, innovative and interesting to your drivers, and to keep your drivers from becoming complacent.

Perhaps this is a challenge that you have not considered before. The good news is that there are a limited number of hazards to which drivers are routinely exposed. In fact, the manner in which most workers' compensation claims in the trucking industry occur can be counted on a single hand *(even on the hand of my careless former high school wood-shop teacher – who incidentally offends someone every time he points).*

With this in mind, don't change the content of your message. Instead, vary your method of delivery enough to keep your drivers attention and to avoid being a cause of complacency.

