

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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Safe Work Practices

The March and April 2003 issues of *Beyond the Cab* reflected upon an insurance industry study that identified 10 "best practices" for trucking companies with respect to workers' compensation. Many of those "best practices" have been addressed in some depth within subsequent issues of *Beyond the Cab*. However, one "best practice" has eluded the individualized attention that it deserves.

As you may have inferred from the title of this article, the "best practice" that is addressed in this issue of *Beyond the Cab* concerns having *safe work practices*. More specifically, the referenced research study recommended that trucking companies "...have written safety programs that deal with injury prevention which include detailed safe work practices." This seemingly simple statement includes some terms that deserve elaboration.

First, the term "safety program" doesn't merely imply that there is a document with the company's policies relative to safety. A "safety program" is a planned approach to reducing hazards and eliminating injuries. However that topic was addressed in the February 2004 edition of *Beyond the Cab*.

Second, is the terminology "injury prevention." Due to the prevalence of non-driving injuries in the trucking industry, an effective safety program must direct commensurate effort toward preventing non-driving injuries. However, that topic was addressed in the February 2001 and December 2004 issues.

Then there's the terminology "safe work practices" This implies that there are specific ways to perform routine tasks that are safe (or are at least safer than alternative methods).

Is that true? Are there different ways to perform routine tasks such as cranking landing gear, exiting truck cab, and sliding tandems?

If so, is one way of performing those tasks any more safe than the other? Is there a safer alternative to spinning the landing gear handle with one finger as the trailer is lowered? Is there a safer alternative to giving the fifth-wheel release a "good yank" when it is difficult to pull? Is there a safe alternative to getting down from the cab of the truck with your back to the truck? YES YES YES!!!

With that in mind, failing to have defined safe work practices that are communicated to drivers is leaving injury prevention to a game of chance.

Having, clearly defined safe work practices decrease the chance that drivers will choose the less-safe option.

There is one final word from the above-referenced "best practice" that warrants emphasis... and that word is "written." It's insufficient to have safe work practices committed to *your* memory. The goal is to get them committed to the memory of each and every driver. And you can't expect a driver (or anyone else for that matter) to remember everything you tell them.


When you take the time and effort (and it will require both) to document safe work practices for drivers, you are adding a valuable tool to your safety program. The following are just a few of the benefits:

- § Written safe work practices enable you to ensure that all drivers receive consistent instruction.
- § Having employees read and sign written safe work practices communicates the importance that you place on how routine tasks are performed.

- § Written safe work practices give you an objective measure of safety performance without resorting to outcome-based measures, such as injury rates.

Example Raising/Lowering Landing Gear

- § Before raising or lowering landing gear, stretch your upper body muscles. This is particularly important if you have just spent time sitting in your cab with your upper body muscles relatively inactive.
- § Stand with feet shoulder width apart and build a bridge by placing one hand on the trailer. This relieves some of the pressure on your lower back and makes it difficult to twist your body while cranking.
- § When cranking handle, keep your back as vertical as possible.
- § Unless the crank handle is moving with very little effort, switch hands with every half rotation of the crank handle. Anything you can do to avoid twisting at your waist while applying force is beneficial.
- § Crank the landing gear slowly. (Don't Spin the handle). Turning it too fast increases the likelihood that the crank handle will slip out and cause you to lose control.
- § If the landing gear is equipped with high and low gear ranges, use "low" until weight is no longer bearing on the landing gear, then use "high" for the remainder of cranking.
- § If dropped trailers are placed too close together to have the proper stance ask the yard jockey (if available) to move the trailer out for you. If nobody is available (or willing) to move the trailer, stand facing the same direction as the trailer and use both hands to raise the landing gear.
- § When dropping a trailer, leave the gear box of the crank in "low" gear when you leave to help prevent the next driver from straining.



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