

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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Defining Expectations

In an industry as heavily regulated as trucking, it may seem like overkill for a trucking company to have safety rules of its own. But as stressed in past issues of this newsletter, FMCSA regulations are directed at improving highway safety, not necessarily preventing drivers from being injured on the job.

This newsletter will address how to develop meaningful safety rules focused upon preventing driver injuries, as well as some strategies for communicating those rules to drivers in a manner that will have an impact. In the process, this issue of Beyond the Cab might even expand your view of why your company should have written safety rules in the first place.

The title of this issue of Beyond the Cab alludes to one of the primary reasons for having safety rules... to *define the expectations* of drivers and other employees regarding "at risk behaviors." With that in mind, your first challenge is to identify what behaviors represent "at risk behavior" for your drivers, mechanics and other employees.

There are several effective ways to identify at risk behaviors, and if you have never done it before, it is a good idea to try all three presented here. One is to review past incidents and catalog the specific behaviors that caused or contributed to the incident. Another is simply to solicit the insight of your existing drivers and other employees. Simply ask them for very specific ideas for safety rules that might (if implemented) help a new employee avoid getting injured at work. They, more than anyone else know what behaviors place them at risk. Last, systematically separate each job into the tasks that are performed, and evaluate the hazards associated with the individual tasks. For example, the tasks

performed by many truck drivers include getting in/out of the cab, coupling the trailer, uncoupling the trailer, opening and closing the trailer doors, and sliding tandems (among other tasks).

A couple of general points to remember when creating safety rules.... Keep them brief, simple and specific. Concentrate on identifying and addressing the most significant "at risk behaviors." And avoid creating so many safety rules that employees cannot possibly remember them.

Here are a few sample safety rules. They are brief, and very specific. Furthermore they are unambiguous; are targeted at preventing at-risk behavior; and even provide a 2 or 3 word summary to help drivers remember them.

- § **DON'T JUMP** - Drivers must never jump while exiting a truck cab, and must never jump from a trailer, dock or other elevated surface.
- § **NO COWBOY BOOTS** - To prevent slips and falls, drivers are not permitted to wear traditional (slick sole) cowboy boots, and are encouraged to wear lace-up boots that extend at least ankle high.
- § **DON'T JERK** - Don't jerk the fifth-wheel release or tandem slider release. If it is difficult to pull, reposition the truck or trailer slightly to release pressure that may be causing the release mechanism to bind.
- § **USE A HOOK** - To prevent an awkward posture while pulling the fifth-wheel release, always use an assist devise (hook) and avoid twisting or bending.

Once meaningful safety rules have been established, those rules should be presented to your drivers and other employees in a manner that creates "top of mind awareness." In other words, your goal should be not merely to make them aware of your safety rules but to engrain those rules in their subconscious, just like the marketing professionals have done to you and me with the slogans of their clients. To achieve this top of mind awareness, you must use repetition. Simply handing a new driver a handbook with safety rules contained in it, or posting safety rules on an overcrowded bulletin board will never achieve that goal. Place a few safety rules with each paycheck stub; provide an incentive for employees to memorize your safety rules during a safety meeting; include a safety rule in each written correspondence with employees; send them as QualComm messages, or post them above the urinals in your company's restrooms. Be creative and use as many different mediums as you can. Then when you see employees following your safety rules, don't be quiet about it. Let them know that you noticed and that you appreciate their efforts.

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