

10 Steps for Safer Driving at Work

OSHA has joined with two other organizations to publish a 10-step recommendation to make driving at work safer.

You'd think that if anyone should be trained in safe driving at work, it would be state troopers. After all, they spend some 80 percent of their working time on the road, often in hazardous situations.

That's why we were surprised to read on *bnd.com*, an Illinois newspaper website, about an I-64 crash involving one such highway officer. The report revealed that Illinois makes its troopers re-qualify their handgun skills every 3 months, even though a shot is seldom fired. But the only driver training that troopers get is as cadets at the police academy. Once on the job, they learn on their own, or not at all.

This is despite longstanding knowledge in the safety community that nearly half of workplace deaths occur in transportation-related mishaps. Financial losses are estimated at \$60 billion a year in direct accident costs and lost productivity. The loss of life is, of course, beyond measure.

Yet, according to OSHA and two partner organizations, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), much of this carnage could be avoided. The three groups recently teamed up to assemble a 10-point pathway to workplace driver safety.

1) Management Involvement. The organizations say workplace road safety starts at the top. The program needs unequivocal management support in both policy-setting and allocating resources. But workers should be involved in the decision-making process, as well.

2) Written Policies/Procedures. The recommendation calls for a strict, no illegal drugs or alcohol policy during duty hours (which includes all breaks and on-call periods), and suggests dealing in policy terms with seat-belt use, distracted driving (including use of cell phones while driving), and use of personal vehicles for work.

3) Driver agreements. The organizations suggest a *written contract* with each of your drivers in which they state that they understand and will follow all relevant policies and laws. With this document in hand, no one can later say, "They didn't tell me that."

4) Driver record checks. Driving records are public information, and it's easy to get each prospective driver's record of motor vehicle convictions and accidents. The organizations suggest screening out those with poor records or certain serious violations (such as reckless driving) before hire and then instituting a point system on those you do employ. DS Waters, a drinking water distributor, uses such a system with its 3,000

drivers, working in 40 states. Point totals are checked at 6, 12, and 36 months after hire. Drivers who come up short are taken off the road.

5) Reporting Policy. Make it clear that even a minor fender-bender must be reported to a supervisor immediately, via processes in place in advance. But Michael Belcher, director of Safety at DS Waters, thinks looking at accident reports to find bad driving patterns isn't enough. He scrutinizes his drivers' total behavior, even using in-cab video to study it. "People take calculated risks and don't have accidents," he says. "That's why accidents are poor indicators-because most people get away with it."

6) The vehicle element. It's well accepted that road safety has three components: the driver, driving conditions, and the vehicle itself. The organizations suggest purchasing models with "best-in-class" safety ratings from the DOT, then fully implementing the makers' preventive maintenance schedule. This should be supplemented with a complete mechanical inspection at least annually, with all maintenance records kept on file. Insist that personal vehicles used for business also be carefully maintained.

7) Discipline. The organizations recommend a structured program of disciplinary actions based on a pattern of violations or incidents, with known penalties along the way. Some companies use a point system for this.

8) Rewards. The other side of the disciplinary coin is to reward safe driving. The groups advise building driving safety into the overall job performance evaluation, with rewards or incentives.

9) Compliance. Be sure all drivers know the law, as spelled out by various agencies, including NHTSA, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, which regulates commercial trucking, the US DOT and other agencies.

10) Training. Because it's a skill so commonly used, most people think they already know how to drive safely. A solid defensive driving training program can show how much they have yet to learn-likely one reason the organizations recommend repeated training, supplemented by constant reminders.

Source: BLR's Safety Daily Advisor