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Driver Training

For businesses that have motor vehicle operations, driver training can be an important aspect to their success. Putting the proper emphasis on the areas of training to be covered and carefully choosing the people qualified to perform the training will help facilitate a successful program. This report outlines the types of training, selection of a driver-trainer, and the areas that should be considered in establishing a driver training program, and discusses the lack of data supporting driver training programs.

Introduction

To assure that new employees have the knowledge and skills necessary to perform the job in the manner expected, as well as to provide the opportunity to review individual company policies with each driver, it is widely believed that driver training must supplement the driver selection program. The amount of training that is needed varies directly with the complexity of the job and the knowledge and experience of the employee. An effective training program addresses the knowledge and skills necessary for an employee to perform in a satisfactory and safe manner, and attempts to bridge the gap between the employee's existing level of knowledge and that required for the job.

Proper training should reduce operational disruptions and minimize unnecessary costs from accidents and equipment abuse. Positive driver attitudes can be promoted by emphasizing that the intent of the training program is to benefit drivers by helping them to perform their jobs safely and efficiently. Drivers must be shown the critical relationship between their actions and the success of the business.

This report outlines the types of training, selection of a driver-trainer, and the areas that should be considered in establishing a driver training program, and discusses the lack of data supporting driver training programs.

Types of Training

Three types of driver training should be considered when establishing a driver training program—initial, refresher, and remedial.

- Initial training should be given to new personnel so that each employee is properly indoctrinated prior to starting work. Even drivers with many years of experience have a need for orientation due to differences in types of cargo, vehicles, and operations. As there are few "perfect" drivers, initial training should address the areas identified during a driver's road test that need improvement.
- Refresher training can be very useful for regular drivers to update information on operational changes, new routes, cargo, equipment, and government regulations, and to reinforce defensive driving awareness.
- Remedial training may be useful to help alleviate substandard performance. The need for remedial training may be identified by customer complaints, complaints from the public, accident involvement, moving traffic violations, or reports of vehicle misuse or abuse.

Driver Trainers

A key element of a successful driver training program is to carefully select a qualified instructor. Depending on the size of the operation, this may be a full- or part-time responsibility. Whenever possible, a driver trainer should be recruited from within the organization to avoid problems resulting from an “outsider’s” lack of familiarity with the company’s operations, lack of knowledge of existing problems and policies within the fleet, or possible resentment by the existing drivers. While these factors can be overcome, the effort might prove to be time-consuming and disruptive. Training an existing employee to perform the driver training function can prove to be a tremendous asset to the company.

The person selected to be the driver trainer should have a superior personnel and safety record (to serve as an example for others) and sufficient experience with the company to have knowledge of its operations, procedures, and future plans. A mature, enthusiastic individual is essential in order to gain the respect of the other drivers and to deal effectively with supervisory personnel. It is also necessary for the driver trainer to be able to analyze and interpret driver performance and accident records, as well as to communicate those findings.

Beyond the fundamentals of safe driving, driver training must also address other areas, such as company rules and policies, operation of specialized equipment, routes and schedules, emergency procedures, cargo handling (especially when hauling hazardous materials), security, and government regulations.

Management must do everything possible to provide the necessary support systems to make the driver trainer effective. Foremost, it must recognize that the person selected must be able to teach others effectively. If the individual lacks the necessary teaching experience, it may be advantageous for that person to attend a course designed specifically to “train the trainer.”

Training Approaches

There are two general approaches to training—classroom and hands-on.

- Classroom training can be accomplished using either a one-on-one or group approach. This type of training is used for company rules, federal and state regulations, routes and schedules, accident and emergency procedures, basic cargo handling methods, and basic defensive driving techniques.
- Hands-on training is most effective for equipment familiarization, pre-trip inspections, cargo handling, and defensive driving. It can provide one of the best methods of giving practical instructions to a driver under closely controlled conditions.

Program Contents

The driver training program needs to address the areas that a driver will face in the course of day-to-day operations, as well as unusual or emergency situations that may occur. At a minimum, a good driver training program should address the areas below.

Company Rules and Policies

Company rules and policies should be provided to drivers in written form. Revisions to this information should be given to drivers on a timely basis, and it should be assured that each driver understands the changes. The person who indoctrinates a new driver into the company should review the rules and policies with the driver.

Equipment Familiarization

Equipment familiarization is necessary to minimize unintentional equipment misuse and abuse. With the large variety of combinations of engines, transmissions, and rear-ends, it makes good operating sense to show a newly hired driver the proper way to operate specific equipment for maximum efficiency and minimum maintenance. Special controls,

including loading and unloading devices, should be demonstrated, and the driver should be instructed in the way to make a proper vehicle inspection.

Routes and Schedules

Routes and schedules should be explained. This information could be included in the materials given to drivers on company rules and policies. Routes should be established to avoid congested areas, poor road conditions, high accident frequency areas, and roads with restrictive conditions, such as low or narrow overpasses or bridges with restricted weight limits.

Defensive Driving Techniques

Defensive driving is driving so as to prevent accidents in spite of the incorrect actions of others or adverse driving conditions, such as weather, traffic, lighting, vehicle or road condition, or the driver's physical or mental state. The defensive driver assumes that other drivers may make mistakes and is on guard in the event an error is made. When giving a prospective driver a pre-employment road test, defensive driving techniques should be evaluated. Any bad driving habits should be corrected prior to a driver's first trip. In order to effectively achieve a change in a driver's habits or attitude, it is essential to have in-vehicle training.

Regulations

Traffic regulations, and state and Federal Department of Transportation safety regulations should be explained to a new driver, with specific emphasis on those regulations peculiar to a company's operations. Drivers should be kept well informed of any changes in regulations that might affect them.

Cargo Handling

Various cargoes require different skills to load, transport, and unload. Dump trucks and trailers, tank trucks, dry bulk products, new-car carriers, hazardous materials, and different size loads all require specialized knowledge that a driver may not have acquired previously.

In order to minimize cargo losses, equipment damage, and third-party claims, it is essential that new drivers are made aware of specific cargo hazards and how to deal with them.

Emergency Procedures

Emergency procedures should be established to deal with problems encountered while en route. In case of mechanical problems with the vehicle, the driver should know what to do with the disabled vehicle, the proper placement of emergency warning devices, and the person(s) to contact for assistance.

Proper procedures to follow in the event of an accident must be established. As the driver may be under extreme stress at the accident scene, and because the initial actions of the driver are often critical in minimizing the effects of the accident, the procedures to follow must be clear and concise and the responsibilities of the driver must be well-defined. An information packet containing instructions and forms for use in the event of an accident should be carried in the vehicle, and the driver should be familiar with its contents.

Justification for Driver Training

Intuitively, most experts believe that proper driver training is critical to the success of a business that operates motor vehicles. Unfortunately, little valid statistical data is available to support that assumption. One of the problems is that driver training is most frequently part of an overall safety program and it is not possible to isolate the incident data to reflect just the driver training component.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), in its proposal for Minimum Training Requirements for Entry-Level Commercial Motor Vehicle Operators, stated that its "adequacy study found few studies within the motor carrier industry that had examined the relationship between training and accident reduction. However, Builder's Transport, Inc., a motor carrier, did a study of 2,600 trained drivers in 1994 that showed a two percent reduction in accidents per million miles

driven in contrast to drivers who had no training. Schneider National, Inc., a motor carrier, also performed a study involving its training on hazard-driving conditions, and found a 40 percent reduction in accidents. In both of these studies, drivers with training had fewer accidents.”

FMCSA, in its March 2003 publication, *Best Highway Safety Practices: A Survey About Safety Management Practices Among the Safest Motor Carriers*, demonstrated motor carrier support for training. In the survey, managers of the safest fleets were asked about their level of agreement with three statements about both pre-service and in-service training programs. About 88 percent of all carriers agreed that pre-service driver training is a strategic safety investment. This percentage rose to 90 when carriers were asked about their in-service driver training.

Future studies on the benefits of driver training are planned by the FMCSA, as well as insurers and academia. However, all that can be assumed at this point is that driver training should be a part of the larger accident control program for motor vehicle operators.

References

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3. —. *Best Highway Safety Practices: A Survey About Safety Management Practices Among the Safest Motor Carriers*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, 2003. <http://ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/CarrierResearchResults/PDFs/BestHighwaySafetyPractices.pdf>.

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