

▶ *Hanover Risk Solutions*

# Road Observation

Supervision of drivers is difficult when they are on the road. To help better assess a driver's abilities, and, to some degree, attitudes about driving, various road observation systems have been successfully employed. For a road observation program to be successful, drivers need to be aware that their performance is being randomly monitored and motor carriers need to provide ongoing feedback to drivers about their performance. This report provides an overview of road observation techniques.

## Introduction

Road observation can include both direct observation of drivers by motor carriers or their representatives, as well as reports received from the general public. Results should not be used solely as a negative form of driver supervision, but should expose both favorable and unfavorable results. Direct observation allows monitoring of the actions of drivers and condition of vehicles, and, when performed by the motor carrier itself, can be used to identify road conditions likely to affect operations or cause undue hazards.

Reports by the general public can provide specific driver behavior information to the motor carrier. A number of companies offer a reporting system employing a sign with a toll-free telephone number that is displayed on the truck to advise people to report on the actions of drivers. However, these reports from the general public need to be carefully evaluated. While vendors selling these services make significant claims regarding accident reduction, ongoing results will depend on management commitment to the program.

A problem to be overcome in making road observation feasible is the numbering of units to assure that they will be accurately identified. The vehicle identification number should be readily visible from the front, rear and both sides of the unit. The color of the number must contrast with the color of the vehicle and be readily visible under normal highway lighting conditions, as well as from headlight beams.

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## Direct Observation

The person performing road observation for a motor carrier must be selected with due consideration for the job to be performed as most fleets also will use this person for additional tasks, such as driver training, accident investigation, and terminal audits. The person selected must have thorough knowledge of how to evaluate driving performance (both good and bad), the ability to recognize obvious equipment problems, and also be able to communicate the results of his/her observation.

## Equipment

The duties of the person performing road observation activities, where they will be performed (i.e., urban or rural areas), and the extent of the program will determine the type of equipment that will be required. Minimum equipment could be no more than report forms and a writing instrument; however, since no attempt should be made to make written reports while driving, a tape recorder is recommended for recording information while on the road—the tape recording can be later transcribed. Additional equipment might include a flashlight, spotlights, emergency warning devices, fire extinguishers, first aid equipment, communications equipment (e.g., cellular phone), a radar unit, and a camera.

When possible, the vehicle used to perform road observation should be marked to identify its use by the company for safety purposes, to show the public the company's concern for highway safety, to demonstrate to drivers the company's concern for good driving practices, and to allow drivers to readily identify the vehicle in the event it is necessary for the observer to direct a vehicle off the road in an emergency situation.

## Operating Procedures

Direct road observation should only be done when the observer is sure that this activity will not create a hazard to others on the highway. The vehicle identification, location, time, road conditions, condition of the unit, operation of the unit and any information pertinent to a fair evaluation should be recorded and the observation should be of sufficient duration to provide an accurate analysis (generally 3–5 miles in rural areas and less in urban areas).

Stopping vehicles en route should be done only when hazardous conditions of the vehicle are likely to cause an accident.

## Reporting Procedures

Report forms should be prepared and submitted within 24 hours of the observation to aid in identification of the driver. The results should be communicated to the driver irrespective of whether they were good or bad. In the event of a serious violation, a meeting with the driver should be held as soon as possible to make the driver aware of the problem and to provide driver training.

## Public Observation

The public can be used to add insight/data to the driver supervision task through the use of "How's My Driving" programs. Managed by either the fleet operator or a third-party vendor, the use of telephone reporting of a driver's behavior by the public has shown increasing value. Generally, such programs use a toll-free number prominently displayed on a decal on the vehicle to provide the public with on-the-spot information to report dangerous or commendable driver behavior.

Numerous studies by insurance companies and fleet operators have indicated that a well-designed and implemented "How's My Driving" program has a positive effect on accident reduction. Some third-party vendors are so confident in their programs that they offer a money-back guarantee if the program doesn't reduce crashes during the first year of implementation (e.g., a minimum 10 percent reduction).

## Program Elements

If a fleet operator decides to implement a “How’s My Driving” program, specific, reasonable goals for the program should be developed.

Management, drivers, and union representatives need to be fully aware of the goals of the program, how the program operates, and what actions will be taken when a report is received.

Ideally, the telephone number posted on the vehicle should be dedicated to “How’s My Driving” calls and be toll-free. Person’s receiving phone calls should be appropriately trained to conduct an interview and have a pre-established form for collecting data. Reports should be sent to supervisors and action taken expeditiously, while the incident is fresh in the driver’s mind. Actions taken with drivers should be recorded on the report and returned to a data center to “close” the report.

“How’s My Driving” programs have evolved a long way since their initial function as call centers for complaints. The evolution of databases to consolidate and sort pertinent information and make the information easily available to customers has greatly added to the value of these programs. Many studies by insurers and organizations operating vehicles have shown that a well-selected and managed program can have a direct, cost-beneficial effect on accident reduction.

For additional information, see “How’s My Driving” Programs on our Risk Solutions website.

▶ To learn more about Hanover Risk Solutions, visit [hanoverrisksolutions.com](https://hanoverrisksolutions.com)

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