Components of a driver safety program

Drivers are a significant loss exposure for organizations. To lessen these risks and exposures, there are many risk management strategies and best practices available to manage your drivers and associated driving exposures. Some of these strategies and best practices include:

- Driver selection
- Driver evaluation
- Demonstrating management support
- Written policies and programs
- Orientation, on-boarding, and training programs
- Process for incident reporting
- Protocols for inspections and maintenance

1. Driver selection

a. Defined criteria are used to select drivers
b. These driver selection standards are in writing (promotes consistency) and include:
    i. Background checks
    ii. Drug screening
    iii. Review of past work records (screen out those with unexplainable gaps or "job hoppers")
    iv. Obtaining a 3-year Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) for each driver - MVR's that demonstrate good driving records (MVR does not contain ANY disqualifying offenses – see next section below.)
c. Stipulating that failure to participate in pre-employment or post-hire MVR screening will result in denial of employment, loss of employment, or revocation of driving privileges.

2. Driver evaluation

a. A method is in place to evaluate driver candidates to determine if they are acceptable drivers. Included could be:
    i. Verification that driver's license is valid.
        1. Photocopy both sides and place in drivers file
        2. Note any driving restrictions
        3. Corrective lenses, no nighttime driving, etc. (for example)
    ii. Hiring only experiences drivers with a minimum of 5 years of driving experience
    iii. Hiring only drivers 25 years and older
    iv. Disqualifying drivers with three (3) or more violations in 3 years
    v. Disqualifying any driver with the following violations regardless of the time period:

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1. Violation in connection with a fatal accident
2. Using a vehicle to elude an officer
3. Hit and run
4. Driving under a suspended, revoked, or expired license
5. Felony with vehicle
6. False report to police department
7. Permitting an unlicensed driver to drive
8. Reckless, negligent, careless driving or racing
9. Speeding in excess of 20mph over speed limit

vi. Two (2) or more preventable accidents* in 3 years

vii. Utilization of a drug and alcohol testing program

viii. Any driver convicted of any alcohol or drug related offenses including, but not limited to, driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs within the past five years

ix. Conducting road tests, driver ride-along evaluations, etc.

x. Testing drivers on rules, knowledge of safety precautions and other elements important to that particular organization

xi. Once eligible drivers have been identified, establish (and maintain) an up to date driver's list of all personnel who would ever be authorized to operate a vehicle on behalf of your organization. This should include full-time, part-time, infrequent, or incidental drivers. Record driver information as it appears on the driver's license

b. You should have procedures in place to assure your drivers maintain an "acceptable" MVR during the tenure of their employment. You can verify this with an annual MVR review.

* A preventable accident is any traffic accident which results in property damage and/or personal injury, regardless of who is injured, what property was damaged, to what extent, or where it occurred, in which the driver in question failed to exercise every reasonable precaution or action to avoid the accident. Driving to avoid preventable accidents is defensive driving. The fact that the driver was not charged with a traffic violation by law enforcement is not part of our definition.

3. Demonstrating management support

This component may be considered somewhat subjective but there are a number of elements that can demonstrate an organization's commitment to the driver safety program. Some of these could include:

a. A Safety policy statement written by top management
   i. Distributed to all employees
   ii. With a signed acknowledgement
   iii. Placed in employee file
   iv. Posted in conspicuous place
b. An individual is assigned to oversee driver safety
c. Establishing clear Standard Operating Procedures that are in writing
   i. Consistently enforced
d. Your drivers are held accountable for their driving and any accidents sustained
   i. Do you utilize GPS technology?
   ii. Are you using incentivesfor good performance?
e. Safety is a recurring topic in driver meetings (agendas verify safety is included)
f. Safety rules are routinely reviewed (and updated as needed)

4. Written policies and programs

In today's business environment, you can proactively serve your organization by documenting how you expect your business to be run. This can include:

a. A written vehicle/driver safety program
   i. Your program includes provisions for 100% seat belt use, rules about distracted driving, and reporting any moving violations
b. Your rules and regulations are written in a clear, concise manner with sufficient detail
c. Rules and regulations are readily available and easy to obtain in an organized, neat, and easy to use format
d. Everyone thoroughly reviews the rules and is rigorously tested on them
e. The organization effectively communicates any updates
f. Rules are rigorously enforced

5. Orientation, on-boarding, and training programs

Training presents some great opportunities for each tow business to better manage their driving exposures.

    a. In order for it to be effective, training should:

        i. Be recurring

        ii. Use a variety of methods to communicate important safety information

        iii. Coverage continues reinforcement of safe driving practices

    b. Training can be:

        i. Informal (covering a safety topic at the beginning of a shift)

        ii. Formal (monthly, quarterly, etc.)

    c. Topics should be

        i. Selected ahead of time

        ii. Presented in a structured, classroom-like environment

    d. Employees should be tested on what was covered

        i. Test results should be documented and placed in each drivers file

    e. Thorough training sessions (such as orientation and annual refresher training) should follow a checklist to assure all topics are consistently covered.

    f. Training should always include defensive driving training

    g. Attendance should be mandatory – and documented into each employees file

    h. Other proactive practices that might be utilized to help maximize training efforts could include:

        i. Assigning a driver Mentor (that is trained to be a Mentor)

        ii. Including in-vehicle training

        iii. Utilizing a monitored probationary period for all new hires

        iv. Assuring that top management participates in new hire orientation

        v. Including defensive driver training as part of the driver safety training program

        vi. Assuring drivers understand they are held accountable for preventable accidents

6. Incident reporting process

It is important that drivers know what to do (and what not to do) in the event of an accident. An improper statement immediately following an accident could make your organization liable. It is important you establish procedures that inform the drivers how to properly respond in the event of an accident. Your organization may want to consider obtaining legal advice to document how their drivers are expected to respond immediately after an accident. Some organizations have an "accident kit" in each vehicle as a reminder of what should be done. These can contain checklists and important phone numbers along with other important information and items to aid in properly responding. Drivers should know:

- Who should they call?
- Who should/can they talk with?
- What should they say (or not say)?
- What information should they gather?
- Any additional steps they should take?

By having all the proper procedures (and training) in place before an accident, your organization and your drivers are more apt to respond properly to an accident and not react in a way that could be detrimental to your organization.

7. Inspections and maintenance

"What gets inspected gets dealt with" is a management saying often stated and one that may serve your organization well. Properly inspected and maintained vehicles have a much greater chance of operating properly than vehicles that are neglected. It is important for your organization to have confidence in their equipment. Steps your organization can take in this regard include:

- Training drivers how to do a thorough inspection
- Making sure all vehicles are inspected (in writing) prior to use (and as required by applicable laws)
- Having repairs made promptly as needed
- Having all physical damage reported
- Having all repairs done only by licensed shop/mechanic
- Having maintenance files kept for each vehicle for a minimum of 2 years
- Completing preventative maintenance within vehicle guidelines

Having a well maintained fleet will give your organization the confidence that your vehicles are as they should be and not at a great risk of being the cause of an incident due to a mechanical failure.

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Conclusion

Implementing these suggested risk management strategies effectively your organization will get you off to a great start in managing many of their driving exposures. As a manager you have have a responsibility to their employees, to your customers, and to the general public to know who is driving for your company and that they meet the driver guidelines you've established. You have a responsibility to have sound business procedures in place and to train your drivers so they know and can follow these procedures safely. And they need to assure the vehicles they have on the road are safe and well maintained.

Of course there can be many other components to managing all of your organizations driving exposures. You should also consider talking to your insurance agent to discuss your specific circumstances and what else you might do to lessen your driving risks.

The information provided in this article is intended for general informational purposes only and should not be considered as all encompassing, or suitable for all situations, conditions, and environments.

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