

TRUCK NEWS

January 2010

Delivering daily news to Canada's trucking industry at www.trucknews.com

Creating a culture of safety in your fleet

Ask the
Expert



Clive Thomson

For many carriers, every dollar spent on safety programs has resulted in a return-on-investment (ROI) of three dollars, achieved through the reduction of losses, maintenance costs, down-time and driver turn-over. In addition to producing a profitable ROI, safety programs can also enhance employee and public safety, protect your company's reputation and carrier safety rating, and improve your bottom line.

In order to achieve these kinds of benefits, safety needs to be understood as an attitude and a culture that begins at the top, with senior management responsible for setting the standards to which all employees adhere. Those standards need to be communicated, understood, and practiced by all employees, so that they become a way of doing business.

With the support from senior management, the Safety Manager needs to communicate with and obtain buy-in from all other departments to ensure that safety issues are properly addressed. In order to secure executive buy-in, they need to provide a cost-benefit analysis that demonstrates and quantifies the anticipated savings for the company.

So what resources can the Safety Manager use to help create a culture of safety? In most cases, these resources are already in-house, and can serve as extremely valuable assets.

For example, Operations is essentially all about on-time, damage-free pick-up and deliveries. These staff members are responsible not only for driver performance management but also for safety initiatives, which can help enhance driver performance and result in increased productivity.

They also have a greater opportunity to proactively affect driver safety than one might first realize. Because they control driver assignments and have daily driver contact, they have the advantage of being able to identify emerging safety issues as they develop. Dispatchers who view themselves as a member of the Safety Department are a valuable resource, so educating and supporting them in their early recognition and management of driver safety issues are vital to fleet safety management.

Likewise, Maintenance can also be a good support for the Safety Manager, as they understand that reduced equipment breakdown and damage means reduced servicing costs. They have the responsibility of ensuring that equipment is well-maintained and safe, which puts them in an ideal position to identify whether equipment failures are a result of a product defect, inadequate vehicle inspections, or over-the-road servicing while the equipment is out of their control. Communicating these findings to all levels of management will allow for the issue to be addressed either through a revised maintenance program, alternative over-the-road servicing arrangements, or through continued driver training.

Beyond these, an additional resource for the Safety Manager can be their Safety and Training Services Advisor. The leading insurers have a team of some of the most experienced industry professionals who have access to vast resources of information, and they would be available to help you every step of the way.

The important point to remember is that safety managers should take advantage of all that's available to them—there's no need to go it alone.

All levels of management have a responsibility to continually explore opportunities for improvement; not just the Safety Manager. By starting at the top and integrating safety into your entire company culture, your fleet will be better poised for success.

This month's expert is Clive Thomson, STS Solutions Manager for Markel Insurance Company of Canada. Clive has over 24 years of transportation industry experience.

Markel Safety and Training Services, a division of Markel Insurance Company of Canada, offers specialized courses, seminars and consulting to fleet owners, safety managers, trainers and drivers. Markel is the country's largest trucking insurer providing more than 50 years of continuous service to the transportation industry.

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