

deliveries • safe and • sound

BY CONNIE TURNER

Reduce your risk of loss by following these tips for keeping your drivers, vehicles and products safer.

For most floral businesses, drivers and valuable products are exposed to potentially devastating situations every day. The **National Safety Council** (www.nsc.org), a nongovernmental, public-service organization based in Itasca, Ill., has found that *35 percent of all work-related fatalities and 10 percent of work-related disabling injuries are caused by motor vehicle accidents*. Each year in the United States, motor vehicle accidents account for 43,500 deaths and 1.6 million disabling injuries. These accidents cost in excess of \$96.1 billion every year.

Instituting a loss control (safety) program is the best way to protect your vehicles, drivers and products. The program should focus attention on two primary accident factors: *driver failure* and *vehicle failure*.

A good vehicle/driver/product loss control program begins with good drivers. In 85 percent to 90 percent of all motor vehicle accidents, unsafe acts of drivers can be identified as the causes. Only 10 percent to 15 percent are due to mechanical failure. Experience has shown that driver failure can be controlled by a carefully planned program of driver selection, training and supervision, and vehicle failure virtually can be eliminated with proper vehicle maintenance.

DRIVER SELECTION

Effective driver selection begins by clearly defining the requirements of the job, including the duties, the required physical and mental skills, and the necessary education and training.

Have all applicants complete an application form; it is your

first source of information about a prospect. The form should include a release enabling you to check motor vehicle records and work references. Then check them!

One of the most important references for a driver is the accident and conviction record kept by state motor vehicle authorities. These reports are often referred to as "MVR" or "DMV" checks. Statistics show that drivers with poor accident or violation records are much more likely to have repeat accidents.

Finally, never hire an employee who will drive, even occa-

sionally, without giving him or her a road test. Frequently, even experienced applicants have habits that need correcting. Assuming applicants can drive because they claim they have experience can be a costly error. All tests should be conducted using the type of equipment that the applicant will be driving, if hired. Before beginning the test, check the applicant's license for validity and any restrictions.

DRIVER TRAINING

Well-trained drivers are a profitable investment. They operate more efficiently, burn less fuel, wear out fewer tires and have fewer breakdowns on the road. They require less supervision because they know what they are supposed to do and how to do it.

12 driver management tips

HIRING

1. Define the job requirements for each applicant.
2. Check each applicant's motor vehicle record and work references.
3. Conduct a driving test with each applicant.

TRAINING

4. Provide orientation and initial training to new hires before they start work.
5. Provide refresher training to current drivers to update information and maintain their skills.
6. Provide remedial training for substandard performers.

SUPERVISING

7. Establish specific guidelines for drivers' job performance.
8. Conduct random checks to verify that drivers are following planned routes and schedules.
9. Limit the number of hours per day that a driver can work in order to reduce the risk of fatigue.
10. Check drivers' defensive driving habits by riding along at least once a year.
11. Place a decal on the back of each vehicle soliciting comments from motorists.
12. Give drivers rewards to encourage positive behavior.



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An untrained driver is an accident waiting to happen.

Provide initial training to new personnel to get them properly indoctrinated prior to

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starting work. Even drivers with many years of experience need orientation due to differences in types of cargo, vehicles and operations.

For regular drivers, you should provide refresher training on a regular schedule to update information and help them maintain their skills. And you should conduct remedial training when there is a problem of substandard performance. The need for remedial training can be identified by customer complaints, complaints from the public, accidents, traffic violations or reports of vehicle misuse or abuse.

Drivers must be shown the critical relationship between their actions and the success of your business. Effective training is the key to developing proper driver attitude.

DRIVER SUPERVISION

The very nature of delivery vehicle operation leaves drivers under their own supervision for a substantial portion of the workday. A critical element for a successful driver supervision program is establishing specific guidelines for job performance, including evaluation criteria, incentives and disciplinary procedures. These guidelines must be clearly understood by supervisors and drivers alike and applied equally to all drivers.

Most managers will have a fairly good idea of factors such as routes or areas that the vehicles will be using, number of miles for the routes, average time required to complete the trips, loading arrangements and so

motor vehicle accidents

- Thirty-five percent of all work-related fatalities are caused by motor vehicle accidents.
- Ten percent of work-related disabling injuries are caused by motor vehicle accidents.
- Unsafe acts of drivers can be identified as the causes in 85 percent to 90 percent of motor vehicle accidents.
- Mechanical failure can be identified as the cause in only 10 percent to 15 percent.

on. You can supervise these items to a limited degree through random checks to verify that a driver is following a planned schedule.

Close control of routing and scheduling make this supervision task easier. For example, be careful not to make routes too long since this could cause a driver to speed between delivery points to complete the route in a reasonable time.

Any company that employs drivers should be aware of the effects of fatigue and establish work hours accordingly. Pay attention if a driver's accident records indicate a frequency of accidents that could be related to fatigue, such as running off the road, rear-end accidents and single-vehicle accidents.

During busy times of year, drivers are often required to work additional hours. Watch for signs of driver fatigue. A good rule is to limit driving to no more than 10 hours in any 24-hour period.

Managers also should ride with drivers at least once a year so they can directly observe the drivers' actions and note the condition of their vehicles. This is a good opportunity to check the defensive driving habits of every driver and correct problems.

As noted earlier, drivers are left to their own supervision for much of the workday. To get feedback about driver performance on the road, place a decal on the back of each vehicle soliciting comments from motorists with a question such as "How am I driving?" and provide an easy-to-remem-

ber, toll-free number for responses. Use a 24-hour service to screen calls for accuracy. After information has been verified, ask the service to fax incident reports to you so that you can take corrective measures.

A driver incentive program also can be a great way to encourage and reinforce positive behavior. Give rewards for accident-free driving, fuel-efficient driving or whatever else might be suitable. Awards should be presented promptly, preferably by top management and in front of fellow employees.

VEHICLE MAINTENANCE

Once all measures have been taken to ensure the safety and performance of your drivers, a well-managed maintenance program can protect the vehicles themselves. Reduced operational costs, reduced accidents from vehicle defects and improved customer relations are the direct results of a well-implemented maintenance policy.

Follow a preventative maintenance program that consists of daily vehicle checks by drivers and regular inspections by mechanics scheduled on a time or mileage basis. Assign one person to make sure maintenance schedules are followed and records are kept.

Implementing a comprehensive vehicle/driver/product loss control program to prevent both driver and vehicle failure can save your business thousands of dollars and, more importantly, the lives of your employees. ■

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