Best Practices for Improving Driver Safety
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As a business owner, fleet manager or risk & safety manager, driver safety is top of mind when dealing with potential issues within your fleet operations. You want to:

- Protect your drivers’ well-being
- Prevent accidents from happening
- Minimize the risk of liability and accident claims
- Adhere to industry and government regulations

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of fatalities in the workplace – more than fires, explosions, trips, falls and equipment combined. And while employee safety is top of mind, unsafe driving and accidents can negatively impact your business in more ways than one:

- Potential fines for drivers and your business
- Affects the public’s perception of your business
- Decreases productivity in fleet operations
- Increased costs that can cause your business significant problems

To fully understand the problem, let’s look at each of these issues and how they affect your drivers, your business and your reputation.
Unsafe Driving Comes with a Cost

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that on average, a fatality occurring on the job costs a business over $500,000 in direct and liability costs, with each nonfatal injury costing nearly $74,000. But that’s only the beginning. Did you know that the true cost of an accident is 2 to 10 times more than the direct cost? *Think about it.* When you factor in the costs associated with lost productivity, missed appointments, increased insurance premiums and a damaged reputation, how much is your business really losing?

Let’s say your driver has a full schedule of appointments throughout the day. On the way to his first appointment, he’s going 15 mph over the speed limit and causes a vehicle crash. Depending on the amount of damage done, this isn’t going to be a stop and go process. It takes time. While your driver is assessing the damage, collecting insurance information and waiting for the police to arrive, time is ticking away. Not only is your driver now 45 minutes late for his first appointment, but the rest of his appointments are thrown off schedule as well. So, you’re now losing money due to lost productivity.

Not only that, but you have to scramble to reassign and reschedule all of the jobs your driver is going to miss. So, now it’s your time that’s being wasted. On top of lost time, you have to deal with possible customer complaints about late or missed appointments. Unhappy customers don’t typically give repeat business. *Are the costs adding up yet?*
Do your workers drive company vehicles with your brand stamped on the side? If so, your vehicles are considered a moving advertisement for your business. Those who witnessed the crash probably don’t have a positive perception of your business. And what about those who were just passing by the scene? It’s not the first impression you were hoping to give. Now you’re risking a damaged reputation and lost business.

Speaking of damage, what’s the severity of the vehicle damage? How long will it be in the shop? How much will it cost to repair? Not only do you have to worry about vehicle downtime, but the amount of money needed for repairs. And what about insurance? Vehicle crashes can lead to a substantial increase in your insurance premiums, draining your budget even more.

**Do you really want to deal with the harsh consequences that come with an at-fault vehicle crash?** Probably not. That’s why it’s crucial that your drivers are maneuvering the roadways safely. So, let’s discuss how to improve the safety of your drivers with a complete safety solution for your business.
Do you have a safety program in place? The first step to driver safety is implementing a safety program within your organization and getting buy-in from your management, staff and drivers. A driver safety initiative is only successful if it is strongly enforced. What should be included in a driver safety program? While this varies depending on the company, you should consider the following:

1. **Driver History Background Check** – If a potential candidate has a speeding ticket from 10 years ago and nothing else on his/her record, you probably have a good hire. What happens if you find excessive tickets, accidents claims or DUI arrests? Doing the work before you hire can save you time and money.

2. **Driver Safety Policy** – Implementing a written driver safety policy doesn’t have to be hard. Find a simple agreement that the driver can read and have both a manager and the driver sign off on the document. It should also be communicated to drivers on a regular basis – whether weekly, monthly or quarterly.

3. **A No Cell Phone Policy** – Distracted driving is becoming an increasingly dangerous trend and cell phone use tops the list. The government’s www.distraction.gov site singles out cellphones as the greatest danger among all sources of driver distraction. Download a free cellphone policy kit from the National Safety Council (NSC).

4. **Preventive Maintenance** – Properly maintain and routinely inspect company vehicles to help prevent crashes and related accidents. Brake pads, tire tread and pressure can all contribute to a vehicle not being able to stop in the event of a potential accident.

5. **Driver Training and Education** – Whether you plan to implement a proactive driver training program or deal with drivers with repeat offenses on a one-off basis, having a driver education initiative reduces the likelihood of repeat incidents. Whether it’s aggressive driving, speeding or fleet-specific courses, there are resources out there for you to use.
Now that we have discussed how to build a foundation for your safety program, let’s move on to the solution that will completely transform the safety culture of your company.

Many businesses are utilizing GPS fleet tracking technology to help improve safety and reduce risk. Why? GPS fleet tracking technology provides fleet managers with true insight into driver behavior, without them having to sit in the passenger seat. How does it work?

With a GPS fleet tracking solution, you’re able to monitor driver behavior patterns such as speeding, aggressive driving and distracted driving. If your drivers exceed the posted speed limit, you will receive an instant alert to your email notifying you of this behavior. Is aggressive driving a problem in your fleet? With automated reports, you can monitor actions such as harsh braking, sharp turns, cornering, etc. This allows you to pinpoint which of your drivers practice safe habits and which need more training.

According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), a driver distracted by his cell phone is 23 times more likely to get in a crash. A complete driver safety solution in tandem with a fleet tracking application can help to curb distracted driving. If your drivers are texting, emailing or surfing the web while the vehicles are in motion, you have the option to disable their mobile devices, eliminating distraction on the spot.

GPS fleet tracking technology provides true insight into driver behavior.
Along with disabling mobile device use, you can prevent distracted driving by providing your drivers with voice-guided, turn-by-turn directions to all locations. This helps your drivers to focus on the road rather than on the distractions that cause crashes.

Are your vehicles receiving proper routine maintenance? Vehicles can become unsafe to drive if maintenance is not performed regularly. With automated maintenance schedules, you can easily keep track of preventive maintenance and ensure your vehicles are safe to operate at all times. This helps to prevent serious crashes and injury and reduces the risk of you being held liable for negligent entrustment.

Let’s say your driver was involved in a crash but wasn’t at fault. If the other driver involved were to throw a false claim your way, would you be able to provide hard proof to back up your case? Fleet management technology allows you to pull up documentation to help you fight false claims and win potential legal battles. Not only that, fleet tracking has become such a crucial safety tool that many insurance providers even offer discounts to fleet managers that actively utilize the systems.

As you can see, a complete safety solution involves a multitude of factors that work together to improve the safety of your drivers, vehicles and business. Now that you’re aware of the benefits associated with a driver safety program, let’s discuss the steps you should take before implementing a solution.
Choosing the Right Safety Solution for Your Business

Before you take the first step toward driver safety, it’s important to find the right safety solution for your business. We have provided you with examples of what to include in your safety program and informed you of the different types of driver training methods out there. You now have a starting point to help you develop a safety initiative and choose a training method. The next step is finding the right fleet management provider for your business.

While it’s easy to realize the benefits of GPS fleet tracking technology, it can be difficult to choose between the ever-growing numbers of companies that provide the service. Here are 5 questions to consider when choosing a fleet management provider:

01: How long has the company been in business?
02: Do they have a proven track record of industry firsts?
03: Is the system reliable and easy to use?
04: What kind of customer service is offered?
05: Do they offer free, unlimited and ongoing training?

Interested in seeing if the NexTraq® solution is the right fit for your business? Visit www.nextraq.com or call us at 800.358.6178. We look forward to hearing from you and helping you take the next step toward improving the safety of your drivers, vehicles and business.