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Fleet Safety Tune-Up

Auditing Your Best Efforts Against ANSI Z15

By Paul Farrell

Fleet safety programs are developed and deployed differently at every company. The right “mix” of safety practices for your fleet might not be the best fit for someone else, but you can take steps to confirm that you’re getting the best possible results for your efforts. Periodic self-audits against a best practices standard such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z15 — Safe Practices

for Motor Vehicle Operations can be a great place to start.

ANSI Z15 separates fleet safety programs into five key areas:

- Management Policies
- Operational Environment
- Driver Issues
- Vehicle Issues
- Incident Reporting and Analysis

Management Policies

The first section of the standard examines the foundation of your fleet safety program. All of the activities, practices and policies (i.e., training, audits and collision analysis) should be organized into a complete, written program. By comparing the recommendations of Z15 to your current program guide, you can begin to identify missing activities or policies or situations where the activity is done, but not documented as part of the program.

Z15 provides a list of commonly included items that most written programs will address. If your program document does not include these items, you might want to investigate why they have been omitted and whether your program would benefit from including them at this time.

Operational Environment

The interaction of the driver and the vehicle are critical to safe operation. Do drivers understand how to use the safety appliances within the vehicle correctly, and do they use them consistently? If drivers fail to use their seat belts or properly adjust their mirrors, they are placing themselves at risk of injury. Similarly, driver impairment through the use of medications, illicit drugs or alcohol increases the exposure to loss.

Routing and scheduling practices can affect driver safety so it is important to review the practices of dispatchers to assure that weather conditions, traffic congestion and detours are factored into estimated arrival times. Z15 organizes these concerns so that you can confirm that your program consistently addresses the operational environment.

Driver Issues

Because your drivers' performance behind the wheel makes a public statement about your commitment to safety and community service, the methods of selecting, screening and training drivers are vitally important. The validation of new drivers usually begins with a job description and written application to define basic driving duties and requirements. The process typically continues with an investigation of their driving history (i.e., tickets and past collisions as reported on state-issued motor vehicle reports) as measured against a company benchmark of performance — e.g., too many tickets or crashes leads to probation, retraining and possibly suspension of driving duties.

Initial and ongoing training of drivers should be tailored to fit the needs and exposures of your operations (e.g., driving in snow and ice vs. driving off-road in desert terrain).

One area covered by Z15 that many companies neglect is driver management — i.e., any process used to ensure that policies and practices are being consistently followed by drivers. This can include behavior-safety reports, supervisory observations, black box recorder data and the increasingly popular and highly effective "How's My Driving?" report hotline programs.

SafetyFirst, a NUCA partner, provides this type of program to many NUCA members. (For more information, see the Safety Services section of the NUCA Web site). Jim Humphrey, Safety and Risk Manager for SafetyFirst user MasTec-Communications Group, said: "We have over 1,500 vehicles operating on the roads. The SafetyFirst hotline program provides us with a cost effective means of monitoring and measuring our fleet and driver performance in virtually real time. Their reports assist us in recognizing our safe drivers and identifying those areas of our fleet safety program that need improvements. This allows us to focus our time and resources on the areas that will best improve our fleet safety and corporate image. The program has played a key role in our achieving a 54 percent reduction in incidents and accidents over the past three years."

The program's safety hotlines give the public an opportunity to contribute to your safety results through complaints about perceived, inappropriate behaviors and by recognizing professional actions. About that aspect of the program, Doug Green, Vice President of Compliance and Safety for Benton-Georgia, had this to say: "SafetyFirst is another tool in the toolbox, not only helping with [our drivers'] driving action and safe operation, but also how they appear to the motoring public and our customers. The program has helped us identify and correct unsafe behavior with reports and training materials."

Vehicle Issues

Using the right tool for the job extends to fleet safety too. Vehicles should be ordered with the appropriate safety devices (e.g., extended mirrors, traction control and stability systems), and they should be matched to the job they must perform. Similarly, inspection and maintenance practices ought to be approached in an organized manner so that drivers will report any defects that could lead to a breakdown or accident.

If your company employs a full-time fleet manager, you'll want to work closely with him or her to confirm that this area has been adequately covered.

Incident Reporting and Analysis

The effective management of information about collisions can help diagnose needed enhancements to your safety program. Drivers should receive training on what to do if they become involved in a collision, and incident reporting kits can be used to help assure that all the critical information is collected.

Data from each incident can be used to:

- Identify the preventability of collisions
- Issue recommendations that may save other drivers' lives
- Create fleet safety incident rates
- Benchmark results with other firms

Linking crash data and other safety program elements can help prioritize your opportunities for improvement. For example, a review of motor vehicle reports and safety hotline reports for all drivers who have been involved in a collision might show patterns that can be used to predict future collisions. This analysis has been used by fleets to build "risk profiles" of drivers who might be "at-risk" of becoming involved in collisions.

Auditing your current fleet safety efforts against an existing standard can help identify areas for potential improvement. Once you've completed the self-audit, make it an urgent priority to follow up on any deficiencies that have been discovered. If you need help, remember that you have support available from insurance providers, your current safety vendors and your peers within NUCA.

By Paul Farrell, CEO of SafetyFirst

Prior to joining SafetyFirst as its CEO, Paul Farrell worked within the insurance industry as a loss control professional. SafetyFirst provides safety hotline (aka How's My Driving?) programs to NUCA members. Additional information is available at www.safetyfirst.com.