Auditing Against ANSI/ASSE Z15.1 for a Fleet Safety 'Tune-Up'

by Paul Farrell

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Organizations develop and deploy fleet safety programs to achieve a variety of common goals: collision prevention, driver protection, provision of appropriate equipment and accountability through measurement of key metrics. However, if we were to compare each organization's program, the differences might appear to outweigh the similarities.

The differences reflect the wide-ranging operational conditions and potential loss exposures that each organization faces. Companies that predominately operate tractor-trailers and extra-heavy trucks may focus most of their time and attention on complying with U.S. Department of Transportation regulations. However, other companies with a concentration of sales vehicles and supervisor pickup trucks may spend much time on the details of their permissive-use policies that govern weekend use, personal driving, passengers, etc.

While the right mix of safety practices for your fleet may not be a best fit for

someone else's, you can test your current program to identify gaps or areas that need strengthening. An ideal way to "tune up" your program is to audit it against existing fleet safety standards such as Safe Practices for Motor Vehicle Operations (ANSI/ASSE Z15.1-2006).

ANSI/ASSE Z15.1 provides minimum requirements for workplace traffic safety programs and is designed for use by any organization whose employees drive on the job. Since Z15.1 does not conflict with existing regulations, such as the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR), it provides a complementary set of practices that can work in harmony with the regulations.

The standard is published in a two-column format. The left column provides the wording of the standard and the right column provides supplementary guidance (i.e., interpretation or explanation). This format lends itself to creating a self-audit checklist to examine your current programs and practices. By adding a third column, a fleet occupational safety, health and environmental (SH&E) professional could make notes on how the existing program addresses the standard's requirements or why that specific element would not be relevant to the current operation. These notes would naturally lead to recommendations and action plans to strengthen the existing fleet safety program.

Z15.1 separates fleet safety programs into five key areas:

(1) Management policies.

(2) Operational environment.

(3) Driver issues.

(4) Vehicle issues.

(5) Incident reporting and analysis.

Management Policies

The first section of the standard examines the foundation of your fleet safety efforts — the written program. All of the activities, practices and policies (e.g., training, audits, collision analysis) should be organized into a complete, written program. By comparing the recommendations of Z15.1 to your current program document(s), you can begin to identify missing activities or policies or situations where the activity is done but not formally documented as part of the program.

Z15.1 provides a list of commonly included items that most written programs will address. If your program document does not include these items, you may want to investigate why they have been omitted (e.g., relevance, no operational exposure, simple oversight) and whether your program would benefit from including them at this time.

If your organization has never documented its fleet safety program, Z15.1 provides an excellent starting point to develop your documentation. If you are unsure of how to word a policy, you can usually obtain help from your insurance carrier, industry peers and other ASSE members. In some cases, your current fleet safety vendors may also be able to help.

Operational Environment

Interaction of the driver and vehicle is 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 seatbelt or to properly adjust their mirrors, they place

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themselves at risk of injury. Similarly, driver impairment through the use of medications, illicit drugs or alcohol increases exposure to loss.

Routing and scheduling practices can affect driver safety, so it is important to review dispatchers' practices to ensure that weather conditions, traffic congestion and detours are factored into estimated arrival times.

An extension of the operational environment includes management directives on when and how vehicles may be used for business or nonbusiness purposes — permitted personal use, weekend driving, nonemployees as passengers, rental car requirements and so on.

Z15.1 organizes these concerns so you can confirm that your program consistently addresses the operational environment. The standard includes several sample policies to help organizations that do not presently publish policies addressing the operational environment.

Driver Issues

Drivers are the foundation of any fleet safety program. How your employees physically handle their vehicles, check their emotions during frustrating traffic conditions and nurture safe driving habits directly contributes to results. Consequently, this section may demand your greatest share of time and attention.

Methods of selecting, screening and training drivers are vitally important to obtaining ideal results. 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 driving history (e.g., tickets and past collisions as reported on state-issued motor vehicle reports) as measured against a company-derived benchmark of performance. Excessive tickets or crashes lead to probation, retraining and possible suspension of driving duties.

Initial and ongoing driver training should be tailored to fit the needs and exposures presented in your operations. If your fleet is concentrated in northern climates, driving in snow and ice conditions may be highly appropriate. If your teams drive off-road in rough terrain, you may need to focus more attention on navigating obstacles. Additionally, remedial training designed to change habits may be vital following collisions or near-hit incidents.

While most firms spend much time on driver selection and training, one area covered by Z15.1 that many companies neglect is driver management. Driver management can include any process designed to ensure that your drivers consistently follow policies and practices. Examples of driver management efforts include behavior-safety reports, supervisory observations, black box recorder data and "How's My Driving?" report hotline programs.

Safety hotlines give the public an opportunity to contribute to your driver management efforts by supplying feedback about perceived inappropriate behaviors and by also recognizing professional actions. When this information is used to "coach and train rather than argue and blame," the intervention typically steers drivers toward improved performance.

Jim Humphrey, safety and risk manager for MasTec Communications Group, states, "We have more than 1,500 vehicles operating on the roads. The SafetyFirst hotline program provides us with a cost effective ability to monitor and measure our fleet and driver performance virtually in real time. Their reports assist us in recognizing our safe drivers and in identifying those areas of our fleet safety program that need improvement. 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."

Other driver management tools include electronic on-board recorders (EOBRs). These systems may be part of a global positioning system, may include engine data and some even include video recordings of the road in front of the driver during panic maneuvers. Download and interpretation of data reports are vital to translating this information into actionable interventions with affected drivers. Some systems include driver-training materials to support corrective coaching.

Another driver management tool involves monitoring each driver's history of moving violations. American Transport Research Institute (ATRI) has published a study of more than 540,000 driver records. Its study found that moving violations are a predictable indicator of increased crash risk. For example, an improper turn violation increased the likelihood of being involved in a crash by 105 percent (as measured against drivers with no violation).

To facilitate prompt notification of newly incurred violations, some fleets subscribe to automatic update or alert programs. Programs such as E-Driver File and the Online Safety and Compliance Electronic Reporting system (OSCER) include risk modeling programs that can be tailored to include other elements such as driver tenure, past collisions and special weighting on certain types of high-risk activities.

These profiling methods can help spot at-risk drivers, but they are based on lagging indicators of performance and are developed at high cost to the individual driver (e.g., payment of fines from violations, increased personal insurance rates and decreased employability due to a poor driving report).

Regardless of the methods and programs your organization uses to identify at-risk drivers, it is the timely, proactive intervention with each affected driver that can dramatically reduce crash rates. During the first year of responding

to public feedback about its drivers, Asplundh Tree Expert Co. documented a "24 percent reduction in claims/100 vehicles and a 25+ percent reduction in claims costs." Similarly, Safety Kleen found a "40 percent decrease in preventable vehicle accidents compared to the same time period last year" when they began to intervene with drivers who had received feedback reports through their hotline program. Driver intervention demonstrates both compassion and concern for the driver's welfare by offering on the spot safety coaching.

Some fleets practice driver incentive, reward or recognition programs. Recognizing drivers who consistently perform their daily tasks in an accident-free manner makes sense and should inspire others to pay attention to their own performance.

The manner in which these programs are administered varies greatly, but if your culture feels that incentives are a key part to achieving safety results, then tying driver performance into the program should also be considered.

Do your employee performance reviews include a discussion about driving duties or are these discussions limited to nondriving activities? While jobsites and manufacturing facilities are governed by very specific safety protocols (e.g., PPE, noise controls, ergonomic and other industrial hygiene practices) the time spent behind the wheel can create a dramatic, tragic change in your safety results if drivers fail to receive formal feedback on their behind-the-wheel performance. A driver's performance, and even the appearance of his/her vehicle, makes a public statement about your commitment to safety and community service. Therefore, periodic performance reviews are an ideal time to discuss on-the-road performance.

Vehicles

Using the right tool for the job also extends to fleet safety. Vehicles should be ordered with appropriate safety devices (e.g., extended mirrors, traction control, and stability systems) and they should be matched to the job they must perform. For instance, a vehicle should be ordered based on its maximum expected load. It may be tempting to save money by ordering a vehicle with a lower load rating (since it will rarely be overloaded); however, this practice could lead to disaster if it breaks an axle or rolls over.

Similarly, inspection and maintenance practices should 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 will want to work closely with him/her to confirm that this area has been adequately addressed.

Incident Reporting and Analysis

Effective management of collision information 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 on how to properly use incident-reporting kits (with or without cameras) to ensure that all critical information is collected. Incident data can be used to:

- Identify collision preventability.
- Issue recommendations that may save other drivers' lives.
- Create fleet safety incident rates based on miles driven.
- Benchmark results with companies that are similar to your own.

Linking crash data and other safety program elements can help prioritize your opportunities for improvement. A review of motor vehicle records (MVRs), EOBR data and safety hotline reports for all drivers who have been involved in a collision may show patterns that can be used to predict future collisions. Fleets have used this analysis to build risk profiles of drivers who may be at-risk of becoming involved in collisions.

Sample policies on motor vehicle incident reporting and formulas for calculating crash rates are provided with the standard.

Conclusion

Auditing your current fleet safety efforts against an existing standard can help identify areas for potential improvement.

Perhaps the easiest way to get started is to take a current copy of the standard and translate it into an audit worksheet. This worksheet can be used to document how your current program includes or excludes the various details covered in the standard. If you find areas that are missing, you can make recommendations to include new details or offer explanations of why certain details are not necessary to ensure safe operation of your fleet. An example of this type of worksheet is available at http://my.safetyfirst.com/presentations/SelfReview2008.xls.

Once you have completed a self-audit worksheet, make it an urgent priority to implement corrective actions for any deficiencies that have been discovered.

If you need help, either during the audit or during the follow-up period, remember that you have support available from your company's insurance provider(s), your current safety vendors and your peers within the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE). ■