Before You Hit the Road: Stepping Stones of Driver Safety

Resource Type: Articles

Topic: Facility, Program and Transportation Safety

The leading cause of work-related death is motor vehicle collisions, therefore making the most dangerous part of your volunteers' and employees' workday the time spent on the road on behalf of your nonprofit. If your organization routinely (or even occasionally) has employees or volunteers drive any type of motorized vehicles as part of their job, you should consider vehicles and roadways as an extension of your workplace. To protect your nonprofit's vital workforce, to guard against liabilities and financial damage, and most importantly, to save lives and reduce the risk of life-altering injuries in your workforce, put in place driver training and safety initiatives as fundamental aspects of your workplace culture.

Calculating the Risks

According to the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS), motor vehicle crashes cost employers $47.4 billion annually in medical care, legal expenses, property damage and lost productivity. The average crash costs an employer an estimated $16,500, and when a worker has an on-the-job crash resulting in injury, the average cost spikes to $74,000. In cases where a fatality occurs, costs can exceed $500,000.

Keep in mind that off-the-job crashes—such as those that occur during an employee's commute to the workplace—can also be costly to an organization, even if there is no legal liability for the employer. This is because the worker will have to be replaced, at least for a period of time, and there are often losses of productivity and staff morale in these situations.

A team comprised of representatives from NETS, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) created a worksheet (see page 32) that outlines the potential contributing costs of motor vehicle crashes to employers, and allows employers to work out just how much an accident will cost them. Costs include both direct and indirect costs, such as:

- Healthcare costs
- Property damage
- Municipality or utility fees for damage to roads, signs or poles
- Supervisor's time (rescheduling and making special arrangements)
- Re-entry and retraining of injured employees
- Bad publicity, loss of business

Starting a Driver Safety Program

Many of the factors that contribute to death and injury due to motor vehicle crashes can be eliminated or reduced through education and training. Common factors that may contribute to unsafe driving include:

- Inexperience with the handling of certain types of vehicles or weather conditions
- Difficulty recognizing and responding to hazards on the roadway
- Desire to meet employer time expectations and requirements (these pressures can compete with safety

priorities)
- Inconsistent use of seat belt or habitual failure to use seat belt
- Distracted driving
- Fatigue
- General inattention
- Speeding
- Alcohol or drug use

Case studies on effective workplace driver safety programs have provided insights on the benefits of driving safety initiatives. For example, Charter Communications, a cable service provider in Michigan, has employees that use more than 650 vehicles to drive more than 1.5 million miles per month. After establishing a program to encourage employees to use seat belts when driving, the company increased employee seat belt usage from 74% to 94% during a two-year period.

Revving Up Your Driver Safety Program

Depending on the organizational structure of your nonprofit, you may need to work with your human resources manager, safety manager, risk manager, worker's compensation carrier, accountants, and/or medical and motor vehicle insurance representatives in order to develop a driving safety program that will effectively protect your team. While the fundamental purpose of this type of training for any organization is to benefit your employees and keep them safe, you may still first need to cultivate buy-in for a safety culture through changing and improving driver attitudes and developing safe driving skills within your team members.

The following steps, based on research from NETS and the NHTSA, offer preliminary strides your nonprofit can take to improve driver safety and minimize the risk of crashes involving your nonprofit team members.

- **Start at the Beginning**. Implement a new-hire driver safety orientation that includes a review of organizational driving and safety policies and an overview of business practices and processes tied to safety. Depending on the frequency that the employee will drive, training through webinars and online classroom portals may be effective. Ultimately, whether an employee is a fleet driver or simply offers to drive coworkers to lunch, everyone should be familiar with your nonprofit's driving and safety policies.
- **Don't Forget Your Volunteers**. Even though your organization might not hire commercial drivers to operate large vehicles or transport large numbers of clients, you may be inviting great risk to your nonprofit by asking volunteers to drive for you—by running simple errands or by transporting clients and other volunteers. Volunteers must be made aware of safe driving expectations, just as employees are.
- **Conduct MVR Checks and Review Crash Reports**. Conduct Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) checks (and periodically recheck MVR records) especially for employees or volunteers who are hired for the primary purpose of driving, or for any staff or volunteers who will be driving on a regular basis on behalf of your organization. Poor drivers can be screened out prior to hire, or can be required to complete additional driver training or drive with supervision. Also establish a crash reporting and investigation process, train your employees and volunteers how to report accidents, crashes and near-misses, and educate them about the importance of timely reporting of both accidents and near-misses.
- **Write it Out**. Develop a written statement that emphasizes the commitment that your nonprofit has made to providing a safer driving environment. This statement might include a clear, enforceable code of conduct listing unsafe behaviors and actions that your drivers agree to avoid while driving on behalf of your organization.
- **Balance Discipline and Rewards**. Develop a strategy to regulate the course of action after the occurrence of a "preventable" incident, whether it is a moving vehicle crash, or simply backing into a curb with minimal damage to the vehicle. Your strategy should describe the specific actions that will be taken if a driver accumulates a certain number of preventable violations. While outlining disciplinary procedures, consider recognizing and rewarding safe driving behaviors, and incorporate this acknowledgement into your performance management system.
- **Get Everyone Involved**. Everyone in your organization should be encouraged, if not required, to participate in your driver safety process, including top-level management. Since leaders have the authority to set policies, allocate resources, encourage employee participation, and influence the workplace culture into one that views safety as a top priority, their support of the process is vital in order to get it off the ground and to keep employees involved.

Tips for Getting Up to Speed

- **Work to Obtain Buy-In**. Actively engage your employees, volunteers and leadership teams by encouraging them to participate in training, and by providing materials and resources to promote awareness about the importance of safe driving and your new program. Creating appropriate buy-in prior to unleashing a new program will make everyone more comfortable with the initiative, and serve to make the adoption of the program smoother than it might otherwise be.
- **Draft and Enforce Written Policies to Promote Driver Safety**. Your policy should include a clear and compelling statement about your organization's commitment to safety and its desire to protect employees, volunteers, clients, stakeholders, and others on the road. It should next outline specific requirements and expectations you have for your workers. You may also want to create a corresponding code of conduct with simple statements that employees and volunteers can read and sign to agree to comply with. Consider addressing these topics in your policy:
    - Seat belt use is required
    - Use of drugs or alcohol prior to driving on the organization's behalf is strictly prohibited
    - No personal electronic devices (PEDs) or smartphones may be used while driving for the nonprofit
    - Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) checks will be obtained annually for all staff who have regular driving responsibilities; also clarify the types of motor violations that make employees and volunteers ineligible for driving roles
    - Crashes, accidents and nearmisses must be reported as soon as practicably possible
    - Disciplinary program and reward program details
    - Passenger limits based on vehicle types
    - Vehicles are selected, maintained and inspected in accordance with organization policy; determine and describe what your policy entails
- **Design Basic Orientation Materials on Driver Safety**. These materials may be customized for the group being trained, or may be general and applicable to all employees and volunteers, even if your organization doesn't hire individuals who drive regularly on behalf of the organization. A driver safety orientation program might include:
    - Basic driving tips
        - Appropriate hand position
        - How anti-lock braking systems work, and what that means for your drivers
        - Maintaining an appropriate distance from the vehicle ahead of you
        - Using your turn signals regularly
    - How to conduct a simple and quick, vehicle inspection
        - Ensuring that the vehicle is not overloaded or unbalanced
        - Inspecting tires for wear and air pressure
        - Checking the oil and other fluid levels
    - Dangers of distracted driving
        - Statistics and information about risks associated with driving distracted
        - Your organization's approach to the prevention of distracted driving

There are many benefits to implementing a strong and comprehensive driver safety program, including more efficiently using your organization's resources, and reducing the likelihood of costly accidents, raising awareness on issues that can be applied to the personal lives of employees and volunteers, and promoting the safety of everyone on our roads. Make the right choice and spearhead a driver safety initiative in your nonprofit.

RESOURCES:

- Cost of Motor Vehicle Crashes to Employers-2015, Network of Employers for Traffic Safety, http://trafficsafety.org/wp-content/ uploads/2016/04/NETS-Costof- Motor-Vehicle-Crashes-to- Employers-Report-2015.pdf
- Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes, OSHA, NHTSA, NETS, www.osha. gov/Publications/motor_vehicle_guide.pdf