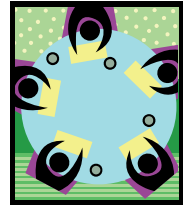


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Friday Safety Brief®

Responsible Business Practices



◆ **Safety Meetings: An Often Debated Safety Program Element**

“Should we have regular safety meetings?” “Safety Meetings don’t prevent accidents”. “We’ve had safety meetings in the past and they just turn out to be gripe sessions.” “Safety meetings are at the core of our safety program and provide for training, awards, open discussion and truly making our drivers feel like they are a vital part of the company.” “We learn a lot from our drivers during safety meetings”.

These are only a few of the remarks from managers and safety directors around the country, in all types of operations. A study conducted by the Transportation Research Board reported that: “In the I-95 Corridor Coalition “Best Practices” study (Stock 2001), just more than one-half of small fleets (1–9 vehicles) hold regularly scheduled safety meetings, but nearly 90% of large fleets and bus fleets hold such meetings. Eighty-seven percent of their respondents rated safety meetings as being important to carrier safety.”

While safety meetings have proven to be an important part of any carrier’s safety program, they are just one component of a good safety program that effectively prevents accidents and losses of all types. Each component must be carried out with genuine support and interest from everyone within the company. That also means their “involvement” in those elements, including safety meetings.

Safety meetings provide for person-to-person communication regarding virtually everything that is vital to the company. And if it’s vital to the company, it’s vital to every person within the company. That means safety meetings can be used for almost anything from training to disseminating critical information about the company, and from recognition for a job well done to gathering ideas from those who conduct their jobs every day. And, while written notifications, directives and the like are probably effective to some degree, there’s nothing like face-to-face communication to get the point across or simply to discuss an issue. From our perspective, after visiting with literally thousands of fleets over the past several years, the **effective** safety programs include safety meetings that are carried out with real gusto. And these fleets never report that safety meetings turn out to be “gripe sessions”.

◆ **This brings up the issues of training and of road testing drivers:**

Yes, require ALL driver applicants to undergo a road test, even owner/operators. This assures you that the new driver can (and does) SAFELY operate the equipment. Experience sometimes makes poor driving techniques become habit. Strict adherence to the entire driver qualification process also shows the new driver that your safety program is for REAL and that you fully expect everyone to follow all company safety policies and procedures. During the road test, notate any maneuvers that could have been better, even if they were not necessarily violations. Note turning (to prevent right turn squeeze accidents) for example. The person giving the road test should be well qualified through experience and training and should be a very good defensive driver and driver/trainer. This will enable him/her to immediately notice any driving behavior that should be corrected. After the road test, the driver applicant should be apprised of the results and necessary corrective training should be given. This training should be tailored to the specific areas that need to be corrected and obviously should include the *reasons* for the methods being taught. This does not always require a lengthy training course but rather specific areas of good defensive driving techniques. Last, find out whether the applicant driver will agree to follow the defensive driving techniques. Then add a very strong follow-up for all drivers. Add a road test to your annual review requirements for all drivers. This puts some real “teeth” into your safety program. In fact, you can make it either a competitive event or part of your driver recognition program – OR BOTH! Incidentally, great drivers welcome the opportunity to show their expertise.

◆ **The Most Frequent “Driver Qualification” Process Failure:**

Believe or not, the most frequent failure we find in the process for hiring a new driver lies in poor or no background checks. FMCSR’s require background investigations of any prospective drivers. Obviously, the purpose is to find out the driver’s driving record from the State(s) of license showing any violations, and, to check with previous employers to find out what type of equipment the applicant drove, what commodities he/she hauled or type of passenger equipment, where he/she traveled, any accident involvement, and anything else pertinent to the job. Due diligence in the hiring and training process is good business and should be everyone’s responsibility. By the way, keep a solid program going and you’ll also reap other benefits, such as reduced driver turnover.

