

### Practical Steps for a Fleet Safety Program

Prevention of automobile accidents is critical for any company as accidents present the risk for fatalities or very serious losses that can involve the driver, other people, damage vehicles, damage material or delay customer service. Employers have also been held legally responsible for collisions resulting in serious third party injuries where driver records had not been checked, or where drivers exhibited negligent behavior like driving while texting.

Although most employers have formal safety programs in place to control worker compensation costs and meet OSHA requirements, they often overlook the need for basic policies to control risks from fleet operations. DOT requirements, like physicals or licenses, are typically met; however, controls for drivers of private passenger vehicles are often overlooked. Basic fleet management policies make sense for any company with drivers as part of their risk management program.

This guideline is intended to help develop a basic policy to control automobile losses. The guideline is designed for private passenger fleets with limited truck use. Operation of larger vehicles with specific DOT requirements may require additional measures regarding physicals, licenses, driving training, and vehicle maintenance.

A fleet policy can be organized to fit the company size and operation. Following are guidelines and brief examples for basic areas that should be addressed. Examples are provided in some sections but each company needs to develop a policy that meets its own policies based on fleet size and type of vehicles. It is important to remember that compliance with state and federal law must come first, like seat belts and cell phone use for example.

An effective fleet policy can be followed with a modest budget, especially considering accident risks and benefits from accident prevention. Motor vehicle reports (MVRs) can be obtained from the Department of Motor Vehicles for \$11 and on-line defensive driver training typically costs between \$10 and \$50 depending on the course. As an example, for a company that orders 20 MVRs a year, the cost would be \$220. If the same company has five new hires who go through a multiple hour defensive driving course, the cost would be about \$250. Avoiding even one minor auto claim would pay for this investment by avoiding the deductible alone, let alone other accident costs.

#### **Introduction or Mission Statement**

Like any good company policy, a mission statement is important to establish company expectations for drivers. If you have a mission statement for the safety program then consider modifying that statement for the fleet policy to maintain consistency. One example follows, but the statement must be tailored to reflect the company culture and objectives.

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Example:

(Company name) recognizes that employees are our most valuable asset and a key to our success. Our goal is to avoid automobile accidents that can injure employees, members of the community, damage material, and impact on customer service. This Manual outlines your responsibilities regarding the use, care, and maintenance of your company vehicle. The program has three main objectives:

1. Establish expectations and policies for operating a (company name) vehicle. This also includes operation of a personal vehicle for company use.
2. Establish policies to assist with driver selection, management, and training.
3. Establish and follow accident reporting procedures to obtain information to investigate accidents and take corrective action

The Fleet Manager (person's name) is responsible for maintaining and updating the fleet Safety and Maintenance Program. Every driver is expected to follow this program and all managers and supervisors will help to enforce this program just like any other safety policy.

## Driver Selection & Management

Regardless of fleet size, assignment of vehicles to responsible drivers and then managing those drivers are the core elements to any fleet policy. Employers allow employees to operate large and dangerous vehicles and are responsible for determining that a person is operating their vehicles in a safe manner. Even though insurance will cover accident costs, in some legal cases employers have been required to pay punitive fines beyond insurance cost when they were found to be negligent in regard to driver management. The basic steps to evaluate drivers include:

- Obtain a copy of a valid driver license and maintain it on file. The driver should notify the employer if their license has been suspended, lost, or revoked.
- A driver license does not tell an employer anything about a person's driving ability other than they have been able to maintain the license. The next step is to order a Motor Vehicle Report (MVR) on all individuals that will be allowed to operate a company vehicle at hire and then annually. This would include employees, spouses, or incidental drivers.

MVRs can be obtained directly from the Secretary of State Office or Department of Motor Vehicles for \$11 which is an excellent investment given the risk from vehicle operation. Employers can order MVRs individually or enroll for a subscription service. MVRs provide a history of driver violations.

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The Fair Credit Reporting Act requires that employers notify employees that their driver records will be checked and following are two examples.

### Example 1:

(company name) is notifying you that the following action will be taken as a result of information obtained from a Motor Vehicle Report regarding your driving record. You are entitled under the Fair Credit Reporting Act to contact and receive from the company listed below, the nature and substance of all information in its files pertaining to you. This information was obtained from:

\_\_\_\_\_ (name of agency)

\_\_\_\_\_ (address of agency)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact

\_\_\_\_\_.

### Example 2:

(company name) will check all prospective employees' driving record prior to making an offer of employment. This will include full time and incidental drivers. Any spouse who is allowed to operate a company will also have their driving record checked before they are given authorization to operate a fleet vehicle. The spouse must meet the company's criteria for eligibility.

### Example 3:

Your driving record will be checked at time of hire and following any preventable accident.

The next step is to develop a policy for using MVRs consistently which is based on points or violation types. This establishes a consistent approach when dealing with all employees. A good policy will be clear and give the driver a chance to reset good standing after a time period with no additional violations.

### Example 1

Anyone driving a fleet vehicle must maintain a satisfactory driving record free of the following incidents within the most recent 3-year period

1. Any alcohol or controlled substance violation.
2. Any speeding violation in excess of 20 miles per hour over the posted speed limit.
3. Drag Racing.
4. Any speeding violation in excess of 10 miles over the posted speed limit.

Example 2

Any driver who receives a ticket involving moving violations (even in their personal vehicle) must inform Management within 48 hours. (company name) will take action on any driver who has more than 5 points assessed in the most recent 3 year period. Any serious driving offense such as reckless driving or driving under the influence - even in your personal vehicle - may lead to limited driving privileges, requiring refresher driver training or other appropriate action to reduce your risk of serious accidents.

Example 3

The following criteria was established to identify high risk drivers. A driver is unacceptable if the driver's accident/violation history in the past year includes one or more of the following moving violation convictions:

1. Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs (DWI).
2. Hit and run.
3. Failure to report an accident.
4. Negligent homicide arising out of the use of a motor vehicle.
5. Operating during a period of suspension or revocation.
6. Using a motor vehicle for the commission of a felony.
7. Operating a motor vehicle without the owner's authority.
8. Permitting an unlicensed person to drive.
9. Reckless driving.
10. Speeding (3 or more in a 3 year period).
11. Two preventable accidents in a 12 month period.

Although less serious violations may not result in removal of driving privileges, management should meet with the driver to discuss habits, or require refresher training.

### **Driver Training**

Driver training can vary depending on the size of the fleet, type of vehicles, and driving routes. Training can include occasional informal meetings, covering topics during other meetings, newsletters, or more formal on line training. Intervals for training can include at hire or after preventable accidents to improve specific driving skills.

No internet providers are endorsed and a search for on line training will yield many results, but here are three sites that provide training options.

<http://www.alertdriving.com/home/>  
<https://www.nsc.org/safety-training/defensive-driving/courses>  
[www.trafficschool.com](http://www.trafficschool.com)

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On line training is a good source to consider as they have professional content, cover a wide variety of topics and options, and provide training documentation for the company records. Depending on the course and content, cost can range from \$9.95 to approximately \$50 per test.

### Cell Phones

Cell phone use is a very important part of any fleet policy given that distracted driving accidents are increasing faster than any other type of accident. As a first step, any policy must follow all state and local laws. If the state determines that hands free phones cannot be used, then the company policy cannot ignore that law.

#### Example 1:

Cellular Telephones– Whenever possible, make or receive calls only after pulling off the road into a safe parking area. Only use the phone during the vehicle operation when it is safe to do so and only if hands free.

### General Rules

The fleet policy will cover specific areas, but many policies include general rules for vehicle operation. The company can add any general rules and following are examples:

- Drivers are expected to conduct themselves in a courteous, professional manner at all times and to comply with all traffic laws.
- Employees who fail to demonstrate safe driving practices will be subject to disciplinary action that may include training, temporary or permanent suspension of driving privileges, and termination of employment in severe cases.
- Seat belts must be worn by you and all occupants of the company car at all times.
- Smoking is not permitted in company furnished vehicles
- Radar detection devices are not allowed in company vehicles
- Drivers are solely responsible for any traffic violations and/or fines that may be received while operating a company vehicle. Please pay them within the time limit given.
- Giving rides to hitchhikers is not allowed and accepting payment for a ride is not allowed.
- Drivers are not allowed to modify vehicles in any manner without management approval.
- Vehicles must be kept clean and free of trash.

### Pool Vehicles and Incidental Drivers

Many companies have employees who do not drive full time, including running local errands. The employer is responsible for all drivers and everyone who operates a company vehicle should be included under the fleet program.

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## **Personal Use**

Establish rules for when personal use is allowed for employees and spouses. Rules will vary by company but can include situations for when use is allowed and trips out of the area.

## **Use of Personal Vehicles for Business**

In some situations, employees operate their own vehicles for company business. Even though they are not operating a company vehicle, the employer is still responsible for selecting and managing drivers since they are being required to drive as a condition for employment. All drivers should follow the same requirements for hiring and period MVRs. Drivers should also report all driving violations to management which will be confirmed by MVRs.

Proof of insurance for the vehicles that are driven should be provided annually to maintain on file. Insurance limits should be equal to or exceed the limits that the employer has on company vehicles. Someone should be assigned to monitor the file to ensure that all drivers have insurance.

## **Accident Reporting Procedures**

It is important to investigate all accident to determine the cause and whether further action, like driver training or a review of driver privileges, is required. Like any disciplinary policy, the approach must be clear and consistent. Depending on the situation, the policy may not result in removal of driving privileges for one accident. Accident investigation procedures should include the following elements:

- All accidents involving the company vehicle must be reported to management within 24 hours.
- The driver should obtain information and complete an accident investigation form.
- The information should be provided to management for review
- Actions outlined by the policy are implemented.

The policy should have established actions for preventable accidents. Remember that not receiving a ticket does not mean that your driver operated the vehicle in a safe manner. According to the National Safety Council, a preventable accident is one in which the driver failed to exercise every reasonable precaution to prevent the accident. One preventable accident could result in re-training while multiple accidents within a specified period may require suspension of driving privileges.

Example 1:

All accidents involving the company vehicle are to be reported to management within 24 hours. All accidents will be investigated, documented and reviewed by management. Management will obtain accident data from the driver through the accident report form and/or by verbal communication. Management will determine the extent of the accident and what can be done to prevent similar occurrences. The accident report will be forwarded to the insurance claims office along with any additional support data (e.g., witness statements, photographs, police reports, etc.). General rules include:

- Be courteous and keep calm.
- Give your name and address to the other party(s) involved in the accident.
- Do not talk about the accident except to a police officer or management.
- Do not leave the accident scene until you are told you may leave by the police if they respond
- Don't make any offers for settlements
- Don't sign any statements or reports other than official police reports.

Any fleet driver found to be involved in more than one preventable accident in a twelve month period, or more than two partially preventable accidents in a 24 month period, by management will be subject to company disciplinary action policies.

## **Maintenance and Inspection**

Maintenance will vary by the vehicle types, use, and requirements and is one topic that is sometimes overlooked. Establish a schedule to follow the vehicle manual and assign someone to follow the schedule. Follow DOT requirements for trucks. Drivers can also be requested to submit periodic inspection reports or management can conduct inspections to note general vehicle conditions.