

# **The Magic 8-Ball of Driver Safety Creating A Safe Workplace for Drivers**

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## **Introduction**

When it comes to driver safety, there are no mystical solutions. Waiving a magic wand, having a séance around an Ouija board, or consulting a magic 8-ball, will not provide you with the answers that will help you eliminate your organization's motor vehicle crashes. There are two reasons why the title of this article is "The Magic 8-Ball of Driver Safety" The first is - There are eight key elements for reducing motor vehicle crashes that are being discussed in the article. The second is - It's a catchy title.

There is a common element among those organizations that have achieved success with their driver safety initiatives. Each of them has a driver safety culture from the top of their organization to the bottom. Driver safety isn't a once and done event for them and they don't take a one-prong approach. They understand that to achieve and maintain success they need to make a true commitment to driver safety. The eight key elements to reduce motor vehicle collisions that are being discussed in this article will help you achieve the success that these organizations have realized. Before we get to the eight elements, let's look at why it important to take these steps.

## **Understanding the Problem**

In order to gain support for a driver safety initiative, the problem must be clearly defined. The risks associated with driving must be presented in a manner that leaves no room for argument. You can begin with government issued crash statistics and then present the statistics for your own organization. Here are some statistics from the U.S. that may help you gain support for your driver safety initiative:

- In 2010, 32,788 people lost their lives on the roadways in the U.S.
- That equates to 90 lost lives every day.
- In 2010, somebody died in a car crash every 16 minutes.
- 1 in 15 average Americans will be involved in a motor vehicle crash over the next year
- 1 in 45 average Americans will be involved in an injury producing crash over the next year.

- 1 in 65 Americans will be involved in a fatality producing crash during their driving lifetime.

Organizations with employee drivers need to realize is that the above listed statistics do not apply to their drivers. It is far more serious. People who drive as part of their job function are at a much higher risk of being involved in motor vehicle crashes due to the fact that they drive more than the average driver. Their risk exposure is greater. In fact, a person who drives as part of their job is three times more likely to be killed in their workplace than a person who works in a manufacturing environment. This creates a very compelling argument regarding why creating a safe driving culture is vital. Year after year traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for American workers and the leading cause of workplace death for most industrialized nations. Safety in the driving workplace needs to be given the same amount of attention as safety in the manufacturing workplace. Too often, the safety of employee drivers receives little or no attention. Considering that drivers are the employees who are most likely to lose their lives while working, it is absolutely ridiculous that more organizations do not address this issue.



The statistics from your own organization may provide another compelling argument for the creation of a driver safety initiative. It would be nice to think that most organizations address driver safety based solely on the welfare of their employees. But, in reality, the financials associated with motor vehicle crashes does come into play. Traffic crashes are expensive. Recent studies have shown that the average cost of a corporate motor vehicle collision is \$18,500. This is the average cost. Some may be lower and some may be much higher. There are numerous items associated with this cost. These include:

- Vehicle repair and replacement
- Property damage
- Medical expenses
- Worker's comp claims
- Lost earnings
- Temporary and permanent employee replacement expenses
- Litigation

There are many other unseen expenses that always seem to crop up. Some of these expenses are unpredictable and are often very costly.

## Getting Started

If your organization does not have fleet safety policies in place, this is where you will need to begin. This will take time and you will need to involve various departments within your organization. At the least, these included departments should be legal and risk management.

Every organization is different and you will need to include policies that cover specific areas of need for your organization. However, it would be wise to include the eight elements of an effective driver safety initiative that are listed in this article. The following are the eight elements that should be addressed:

### 1. Driver Records Checks and Infraction Reporting

If you do nothing else, make sure that you check the driving records of your employee drivers. Make sure that you do this on a regular basis and whenever you learn of a compelling reason that you may need to check an employee's record more frequently. Be prepared to act when you run these records. Your organization is completely exposed to claims of negligent entrustment if you do not run driver records checks. Your organization is even more exposed if you identify a problem driver, and then you fail to take action.

You will need to deal with the Fair Credit and Reporting Act requirements for the various states. Some state's requirements are far more involved than other states. If you utilize an outside vendor for this service, those vendors take care of all of these requirements.

You will also need to provide a provision in your driver safety policies that states that, drivers records checks will be conducted on a regular basis, i.e. every six months or annually, and when determined necessary. If your policy does not have the "when determined necessary" verbiage included, you will be limited to running the records checks based on the time period outlined in your policy.

It is important that you establish a self-reporting policy for your organization's drivers. The self-reporting policy should cover moving violations and collisions. A general statement of: A driver shall report any and all traffic violations and/or collisions within 24 hours of said infraction and/or collision. This should include work time and non-work time. Some have argued that, whatever the driver does when they aren't working does not concern me. The fact of the matter is that, any infractions and/or collisions that can affect the drivers operating license does impact your organization. If a driver becomes suspended, it does not matter when the violations occurred.

### 2. New-Hire Drivers

Statistically, new hire drivers crash more. Considering that these individuals are learning new jobs, driving unfamiliar vehicles, learning new territories, are often overloading their schedules and are preoccupied with all that is involved with starting a new job, it isn't hard to understand why they have problems.

During initial training these individuals are taught much of what they need to know to complete their job tasks. It is equally important that they are taught that the most important task they accomplish each day is arriving at their destinations safely. They need to put safety first when they get behind the wheel. Providing driver safety training during the new-hire process provides them with the skill sets they need in order to stay safe in their workplace. Also, providing driver safety training at this early stage elevates the importance of safe driving from the

beginning of the employment. This is very important when attempting to establish a culture of driver safety within your organization.

### 3. Risk Level Drivers

Consistently, there are small percentages of drivers who are involved in the majority of fleet crashes. The ratio usually reflects that 80% of the problems are caused by 20% of the drivers. Typically, the drivers who have crashes are also the drivers who have a history of moving violations.

Be aware that not all crashes appear in driver records. For most areas, only the reportable collisions appear on driving records. Reportable crashes are those collisions where somebody was injured, or the crash was so severe that one or more vehicles had to be towed from the scene. Non-reportable crashes are the “fender benders” where the vehicles are driven from the scene and nobody was hurt. You need to look at all crash history when identifying your risk level drivers.

Once a risk level driver is identified, it is imperative to take a corrective action that is equal to the seriousness of the driver’s history. It is a good practice to be proactive with this approach. Categorize your risk level drivers in three groups – Level I, Level II and Level III. It is not a good idea to wait until a driver becomes a serious risk before you intervene. Provide interventions that are equal to the level of risk with the interventions escalating as the risk level increases.

### 4. Post-Incident Coaching

It is not possible to take something as negative as a motor vehicle collision and turn it into a positive. However, it is a lost opportunity if a driver does not learn from the crash. Provide training that addresses the type of collision that the driver was involved with. For example, if a driver is involved in a collision where they struck another vehicle from behind, provide them with training that addresses following distance and paying attention to the driving task. Also, the level of the intervention should be equal to the seriousness of the incident. If a crash was serious, an online program may not be sufficient. You may want to look into a classroom or even one on one training approach. You must determine what is best for the driver when considering the circumstances.

### 5. Field Managers

The managers who have direct responsibility for employee drivers play a vital role in the efforts to reduce fleet crash rates. It is important for these managers to understand that they set the tone for the drivers that they manage. If field-level managers offer no support to fleet safety initiatives, safety will not be important to the drivers and the initiatives will fail. These managers need to know that the safety of these drivers is part of their responsibility. Either the managers are telling the drivers to “GO-GO-GO!!!”, or they are telling them “SAFETY! Now GO-GO-GO!!!” They make the difference.

### 6. Behavior Modification

Driving is a series of behaviors that we learn from the first time we sit down behind the wheel. It is important to help your drivers understand which of their driving behaviors are safe, and which ones are unsafe. The drivers need to work to retain the safe habits and work even harder to remove the unsafe ones. In order to be successful with this, you must motivate your drivers to

accomplish this task. This motivation can be accomplished through training, rewards and discipline measures.

### 7. Organizational Hazard Recognition

Layoffs, realignments, acquisitions and product launches are all examples of how changes within your organization can affect an employee's ability to concentrate while they are driving. Drivers become stressed, stress leads to driver distraction and driver distraction leads to crashes. Be aware of how the changes within your organization are affecting your drivers. Create awareness and provide whatever support is necessary to assist the drivers with being safe when these events occur.

### 8. Maintain to Retain

Driver safety is not a once and done proposition. It truly does not make sense to provide a driver safety initiative and then not maintain the effort. Maintaining the results that you will achieve should be very cost effective. Safety messages, newsletters and safe driving recognition are all examples of methods that can be employed in order to accomplish this.

### Worth the Effort

Creating a culture of driver safety within your organization may seem like a daunting task. In reality, it probably is, but it is certainly not impossible and the rewards are numerous. The return on investment will be substantial. At a time when most organizations are looking for methods to reduce expenditures, many are learning that reducing their crash rates provides them with a very welcome financial gain. The far more important benefit of driver safety is the reduced risk and increased safety for your drivers. There are few things in life that change so many lives as quickly as a vehicle crash. It can take less than a second for a motor vehicle crash to take place. An incident that may take only split seconds to occur will create heartaches that are not recovered from in a lifetime.

Get out your "Magic 8-Ball" shake it up and ask it – Is a driver safety initiative worth the effort? I believe that you will receive the answer – "It is decidedly so".

## **Bibliography**

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