

## **Achieving a Culture Where Every Driver Is a Safe Driver: CARQUEST'S Lead Driver Program**

**David R. Jones, OHST  
Regional EH&S Specialist  
CARQUEST Auto Parts  
Raleigh, NC**

**T. Jason Niemiller, CSP, CPEA  
Director of Environmental Health & Safety  
CARQUEST Auto Parts  
Raleigh, NC**

### **Introduction**

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of unintentional incident-related deaths in the United States. Vehicular crashes also result in the most severe injuries and have the highest medical and indemnity costs.<sup>1</sup> The average American citizen drives his/her personal vehicle an average of 12,000 to 15,000 miles per year for passenger cars and light trucks respectively.<sup>2</sup> However, many Americans drive exceedingly more miles each year in an occupational environment. Their risk is compounded even further considering that many of these employees receive little, to no, additional training on the hazards associated with driving.

At CARQUEST Auto Parts (CARQUEST), the average employee (teammate) drives almost 39,000 additional miles as part of his/her job requirements. In 2004, the Company recognized the additional risk to its teammates due to daily driving functions and demanded strong action be taken to protect its valued teammates under its core value and guiding principle of safety and stewardship.

The corporate Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S) Department was challenged by the Executive Operating Committee to devise a strategy that integrated safety into all facets of CARQUEST's delivery operations. This could not be a run-of-the-mill program or one incapable of sustainability. It had to be cost-efficient, effective, and embraced by all levels of the organization for years to come. It had to be a true "game changer."

Out of many hours of cooperative brainstorming sessions and meetings, the CARQUEST Lead Driver Program was born. This program was to be the method used to create a culture of safe driving among the 18,000 CARQUEST teammates, 7000 Company vehicles and 1,500 Company-owned stores scattered across forty-five states.

This paper will focus on the basic elements of the CARQUEST Safe Driver Program; its safety and financial results; and its evolution to what it has become today.

## Elements of the Safe Driving Program

The Safe Driving Program at CARQUEST consists of several elements: Decision Driving © e-learning; a chargeback program; a safe driving bonus incentive; and the most significant element, the formation of the Lead Driver role.

### Decision Driving©

In order to establish a Safe Driving Program within the organization, CARQUEST needed concise and comprehensive training content upon which to build. The training had to be effective and overcome the significant obstacle of training adults on the facets of safe driving. Adults tend to display an inherit belief that they are already experienced, safe drivers. It is often the prevailing mindset among the adult driving population that other people cause crashes, not “me.”

Partnering with CARQUEST’s Auto Liability Insurance carrier, insurance representatives recommended a program that according to them was often well-received and treaded lightly on the existing perceptions of adult drivers. The training suggested was called Decision Driving© and appeared to be a common-sense approach to capitalizing on existing experience and reinforcing the safest of driving behaviors that often disappear over time. The training curriculum focused on five main concepts to coach drivers and reinforce safe behaviors.

1. *Expand Your Look-Ahead Capacity.* Many drivers focus on what is directly in front of their vehicle or what is coming at them just a few seconds ahead. This training element reminds drivers to look further down the road in anticipation of hazards before they are encountered. By expanding one’s capacity to see twelve to fourteen seconds down the road, a driver can anticipate potential situations and mentally prepare ahead of time. The more lead time one has to respond to a hazard, the greater his/her chance of successfully reaching his/her destination without incident.
2. *Size Up the Whole Scene.* It is imperative to maintain a constant awareness of the environment in and around a vehicle. CARQUEST drivers were coached not to stare at any one point for too long. They were instructed to keep their eyes moving and continually scan their environment. Traffic and other conditions affecting safe vehicle operation can change quickly so it is vital to encourage Company drivers to maintain situational awareness.
3. *Signal Your Intentions Early.* Many drivers forego using signals properly and some do not use them at all. CARQUEST trained its drivers to use signals without exception to avoid surprising other drivers with their movements. Anytime a driver warns others about a planned maneuver, he can help avoid a possible interaction with another vehicle.
4. *Plan an Escape Route.* Maintaining adequate space around a vehicle to allow for evasive maneuvers was stressed to Company driving teammates. This “decision space” allows a driver the buffer to avoid potential unplanned events.
5. *Take Decisive Action.* When the basics of proper vehicle positioning and behaviors is adhered to, it positions the driver to take appropriate decisive action to stay out of harm’s way. CARQUEST driving professionals are taught to make proper decisions behind the wheel Company vehicles.

### Chargeback Program

CARQUEST carries high-deductible workers compensation and auto liability insurance plans. As such, the Company is responsible for most costs associated with vehicle crashes, crash-related damage, and crash-related workers compensation injuries. A misperception existed among members of mid- to low-level management that insurance coverage offsets any damage or injuries incurred due to a vehicular incident. To change this misconception of no operational financial impact, a chargeback program was developed.

The chargeback program is a system of charging individual business units back for a portion of the cost of claims for which their teammates were responsible or contributed. This provided local leaders a window into the expenses associated with vehicular crashes and related damage and injuries. It fostered a vested financial incentive for managers to ensure they supported the Company's goal of incident-free operation.

### Safe Driving Bonus

A rewards program to increase bottom-up ownership and recognize individual successes was devised through the creation of a safe driver bonus. The additional performance-based income was welcomed by driving teammates and greatly contributed to the overall success of instilling a safe driving culture. The cost savings of the bonus program were easily offset by the decrease in crash frequency and related property damage and injury claim costs.

### Lead Drivers—The Foundation of the Program

The strategy to reach such a large number of geographically dispersed teammates and instill the value of safe driving was going to be a challenge. The Decision Driving© e-learning was an important factor, but how could the principles learned at a computer terminal be taken and implemented in a real world setting?

CARQUEST needed to deliver value-added, hands on training to all of its teammates in the field. The Company's EH&S team realized the need to push the safe driving initiative a degree further to achieve the results senior management expected. With a team of five safety specialists, it would have to engage its operations partners with an approach that would be both effective and efficient, keeping in mind Company operations and business objectives.

The idea of surveying existing customer delivery teammates and identifying the best performers to take on elevated levels of responsibilities surfaced. These high-talent delivery drivers would become "Lead Drivers." A Lead Driver for each district would be chosen by district managers through a standardized set of criteria and interviews. Teammates that chose to accept the elevated responsibilities received a 10% increase in pay.

The cost of elevating the pay 10% of approximately 100 teammates was minimal compared to the workers compensation and property damage claims-related costs the Company had been trending due to crashes. This was a relatively small investment that promised a significant return, and ultimately provided the approval to proceed with selecting Lead Drivers.

Each Lead Driver received formal classroom training from a member of the EH&S team. This training reinforced the Decision Driving© principles and focused on how to properly communicate, evaluate and coach a delivery teammate on the road. Once properly trained, these Lead Drivers were empowered to achieve the overall objective of coaching and objectively evaluating all teammates in their respective areas.

To record and track their completed evaluations and hands-on coaching sessions, the Lead Drivers were provided access to an internal auditing tool. This tool is user-friendly, widely available, and provided many reporting functions that could be used to report back to senior management. Regular reporting would help drive the accountability.

Accountability was also to be driven through regular training compliance reporting to Divisional Vice Presidents of Operations and Human Resources Vice Presidents. Completion of the hands-on training session was monitored the same as all other Company-required training.

### Driver Observation Sheet

| Location and Date (MM/DD/YY)                                       |   |     |    |    |          |
|--|---|-----|----|----|----------|
|  |   |     |    |    |          |
| Delivery Representative Name (Last name, first name)               |   |     |    |    |          |
|  |   |     |    |    |          |
| Employee #   |   |     |    |    |          |
|  |   |     |    |    |          |
| Lead Delivery Representative Observer Name (Last name, first name) |   |     |    |    |          |
|  |   |     |    |    |          |
| <b><u>Driving Criteria</u></b>                                     |   |     |    |    |          |
| Line   | Expectation   | Yes | No | NA | Comments |
| 1  | Uses seat belt and shoulder harness at all times  |     |    |    |          |
| 2  | Maintains a safe following distance for every 10' of vehicle length in ideal weather conditions, rainy/snowy weather and/or fog.          |     |    |    |          |
| 3  | Driver is aware of traffic conditions in front of him and is aware of any up-coming traffic lights and makes adjust his driving condition |     |    |    |          |
| 4  | Driver is aware of any merging traffic and is aware of other vehicles actions.  |     |    |    |          |
| 5  | When the driver brings his vehicle to a stop behind another vehicle, he can clearly see the other vehicles tires and has an escape path.  |     |    |    |          |
| 6  | Prior to making any turns, the driver consistently uses his turn signal.  |     |    |    |          |
| 7  | While driver is stopped at an intersection, prior to leaving on green light-driver scans for on-coming traffic by looking both ways.      |     |    |    |          |
| 8  | Driver checks mirrors periodically checking other vehicle conditions and traffic.   |     |    |    |          |
| 9  | Driver is consistently observing and driving at safe speed at all times   |     |    |    |          |
| 10   | Driver does not use residential streets as "cut-throughs" in company vehicle  |     |    |    |          |
| 11   | Driver observes school bus zones, and stopped school busses   |     |    |    |          |
| 12   | During all deliveries, when driver leaves the truck, he/she turns off vehicle, removes keys and locks up the CQ vehicle.                  |     |    |    |          |
| 13   | Driver does not eat while driving vehicle   |     |    |    |          |
| 14   | Driver does not smoke at any time while driving vehicle   |     |    |    |          |
| 15   | Driver is aware of the cell phone policy and uses store communications properly if called.  |     |    |    |          |

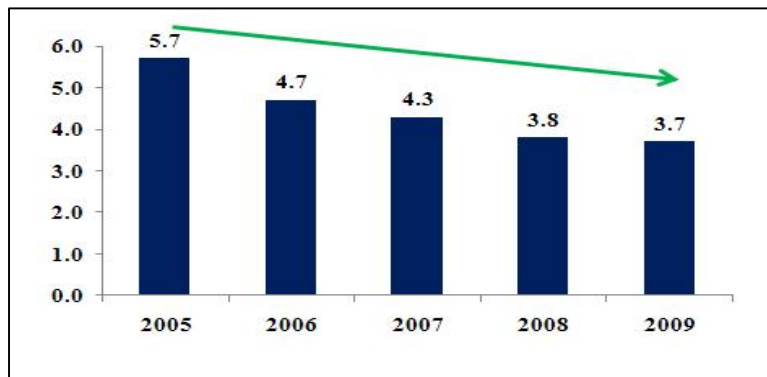
**Figure 1. Driver Observation/Coaching Form**

The results from the program were almost immediately realized. An early success indicator was a decrease in the crash frequency rate (# preventable crashes/million miles driven) and related injury frequency rates. After the first year of the program implementation, CARQUEST began to truly understand the full impact the program was having on vehicle claims-related direct-cost savings.

## Results of the Safe Driving Program

### Crash Frequency

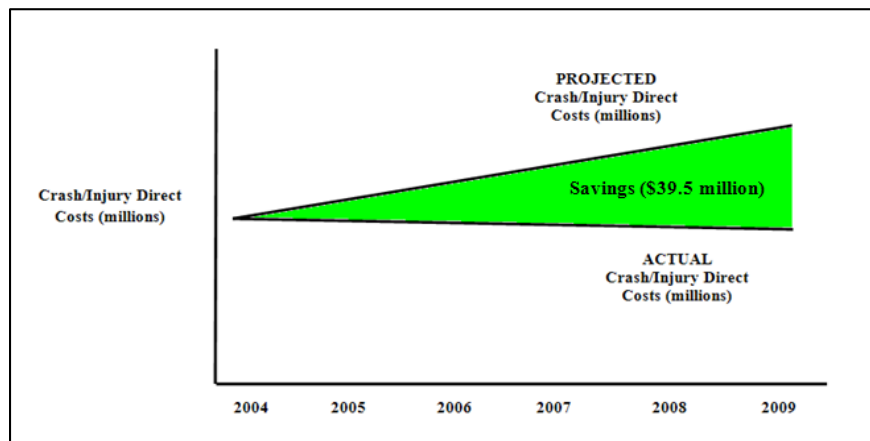
Since the inception of the safe driving initiatives at CARQUEST in early 2005, the frequency of preventable vehicle crashes has declined each year.



**Figure 2. Number of Preventable Crashes per Million Miles Driven**

### Financial

The financial impact to the Company's bottom line has been more than anticipated. In 2004, claims costs for the following five years were projected and a run rate was developed. The recognized savings are documented by comparing the 2004 run rate to the actual claims dollars spent.



**Figure 3. Savings Represented by 2004 Projected Claims Costs vs. Actual Claims Cost**

## Continuous Improvement Efforts

As Company business objectives and strategies shift with current economic factors, opportunities for flexibility and continuous improvement had to be integrated into the Safe Driving Program. During the most recent recession in 2008/2009, the traditional Lead Driver role was facing increasing challenges to its safety-related responsibilities. These teammates' focus had appropriately shifted to the primary role of delivering unparalleled customer service.

As a solid partner with its business customers, the EH&S Department had to challenge itself to mold the Safe Driving Program into one that could continue producing results that would meet or exceed senior leadership expectations. The changes had to sustain the program while at the same time not sacrificing resources paramount to the Company's sales and financial objectives. It became imperative to evolve the Safe Driving Program.

To meet this challenge, the role of the Lead Driver was expanded to other positions within the Company to include members of the human resources department and store management. These teammates were afforded additional coaching to become qualified observers and safe driving coaches. The training they received, coupled with their level of leadership and authority in the Company, positioned them to be equally as effective as the former dedicated Lead Driver position. The overall objective of the Safe Driving Program is to raise awareness among driving teammates and reinforce the safe driving principles learned.

By committing no additional resources, CARQUEST was able to expand the number of qualified observers in the field which has positioned the safe driving program to achieve even greater results in the future.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> National Safety Council (NSC). 2009. *Injury Facts*. Itasca, IL: National Safety Council.

<sup>2</sup> United States Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Transportation and Air Quality. 2005. *Emission Facts: Greenhouse emissions from a typical passenger vehicle (EPA420-F-05-004)*.