



Using Accident Preventability Evaluations to Reduce Accidents

A preventable accident is one, which occurs because the driver fails to act in a reasonably expected manner to prevent it. In judging whether the driver's actions were reasonable, one seeks to determine whether the driver drove defensively and demonstrated an acceptable level of skill and knowledge. The judgment of what is reasonable can be based on a company-adopted definition, thus establishing a goal for its safety management programs.

Note that the above definition of preventable accident is focused on the actions of the driver. It is the commonly used definition in evaluating driver performance. A broader definition, which can be used to evaluate the driver's and the motor carrier's actions, is given by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations as follows:

Preventable accident on the part of a motor carrier means an accident (1) that involved a commercial vehicle, and (2) that could have been averted but for an act, or failure to act, by the motor carrier, or the driver.

The concept of a preventable accident is a fleet safety management tool, which achieves these following goals:

- It helps establish a safe driving standard for the driver.
- It provides a criterion for evaluating individual drivers.
- It provides an objective for accident investigations and evaluations.
- It provides a means for evaluating the safety performance of individual drivers and the fleet as a whole.
- It provides a means for monitoring the effectiveness of fleet safety programs.
- It assists in dealing with driver safety infractions.
- It assists in the implementation of safe driving recognition programs.

Questions For Management:

1. Does the company have a program for investigating accidents?
Is there a company accident review committee?
2. Has the company defined a standard for the safe driving performance of its drivers?
3. Is the carrier's standard for safe driving performance sufficiently challenging such that it would serve to highlight areas for fleet safety improvement?
4. Are the drivers instructed as to what the company standard for safe driving should be?
5. Are the drivers instructed about company procedure for evaluating the preventability of accidents?

Some Thoughts...

- Compulsory programs seem to achieve little except "putting drivers on a notice" of a change or new policy.
- Individual motivation is absolutely necessary and that may best come from a program that offers both positive and negative elements.
- A module series may work best where the safety meetings and topics have a coherent and comprehensible underlying long term plan.
- Offering training modules allows a series of topics to be presented to upgrade and improve knowledge and awareness.
- Modules offer flexibility – individuals proceed on their own with verifications of session completion at their own pace and at a time of their choosing.
- Modules can be easily added with new topics or sessions made available by multiple methods, but if you can "get it into the truck", be it video, audio, or even computer, the driver will likely have the time and interest to participate.
- Module based training allows for important motivational tools, compulsory annual driver re-certification (get trained or lose trips that require specific skill sets covered in the training) and at the same time allow upgrades in driver position, trip eligibility, routing or cargo, or pay increases based upon the specific training modules completed.
- Group training is convenient (for us) and cheap (do it once), but it may belong to a simpler time and a simpler industry; maybe we need to find ways that can effectively get the message out, not to those who show up or want a free breakfast, but to everyone, especially those who need it most.

Our Thoughts...

Training, communication and feedback are essential elements in any company. Safety meetings are a means of accomplishing these and other objectives. Other means of accomplishing these objectives may also be feasible. Defining objectives in writing will help keep you on track. Well stated objectives identify what you are trying to accomplish. Information can be communicated using individual contact newsletters, messages, etc. But training and group feedback may produce better results in a group setting. There may be benefits associated with each method used.