

EFFECTIVE

Fleet Management

By Del Lisk

There are thousands of fleets out on the roads, but only a select few are managed effectively. What separates the good from the bad from the ugly? What best practices separate successful fleets from those that are only so-so? And how does safety equate to an effective bottom line?

The Problem

Every year there are nearly 368,000 crashes in commercial motor vehicles. The consequences of these mishaps are huge. In 2006, 4,321 people were killed in these crashes and 77,000 were injured. With the average crash costing \$91,112, that's a total \$33.5 billion! (FMCSA Commercial Motor Vehicle Facts 2007).

Complicating the issue even further is the ability to differentiate your risky drivers from those who aren't as risky. It may seem easy to use a black box or telematics system to capture risky driving but in a recent study, it was found that 84 percent of in-vehicle driver risk detection data gathered from black box or telematics systems is noise. In this study of 6.6 million instances of triggered driving events, it was determined that only 15.8 percent of the "triggered events" were considered risky behaviors performed by the driver.



The Solution

Historically, public entities and municipalities have traditionally managed their fleets using any or all of the following:

- Classroom instruction and semi-annual/annual refresher courses;
- Driving simulators and related technology;
- Supervisor ride-alongs; and
- Public feedback (e.g. 1-800 numbers).

Each of these has its place in instructing drivers and teaching the tenets of safe driving, but none provide the consistent and objective driver feedback that make safe driving “stick.” As time passes, drivers fall back on bad habits or develop new ones and forget what they learned. Each day, they operate vehicles and are not involved in a collision, these risky behaviors are reinforced. Subconsciously, they begin to think, “I’m a safe driver. It’s the other guys who are irresponsible. I’ve never had an accident. Or, I can handle driving this fast.” Eventually, though, conditions are such that a collision occurs.

For instance, Driver A passes through intersections every day without looking left-right-left, a fundamental of safe driving, and exits unscathed. One day, Driver B runs a red light and plows into Driver A. Technically, Driver B is at fault, but Driver A might have avoided the collision if he had looked left-right-left and seen Driver B approaching the intersection at full speed. Driver A could have held back until Driver B had cleared the intersection.

A more efficient, accurate and cost-effective approach to fleet management that complements the above is a behavior-based driver risk management solution that provides immediate feedback and customized coaching to help drivers identify their risky driving behavior and improve those behaviors. Unlike continuous monitoring devices, driver action activates exception-based driver risk management solutions and is the only way to identify these risky driving behaviors. The end result is that risky driving events are captured on digital audio and video for analysis and, ultimately, driver and supervisor review. The best driver risk management solutions

incorporate video and audio event capture, incident review and analysis and customized coaching to enable the identification and correction of risky driving before it leads to another traffic collision. Properly implemented this approach:

- Improves the way people drive;
- Reduces the frequency and also the severity of all those unsafe driving behaviors; and
- Objectively reports the truth as to what actually happened when a crash occurred.

How the Technology Works

The video event recorder is a palm-sized device mounted in the vehicle. It’s continually recording but not saving any data unless the vehicle experiences unusual force. Any significant movement (such as a hard brake, sudden swerve or hard impact) activates the recorder. Since the recorder is always recording, it immediately saves the critical seconds before and after the incident and sends the audio-video recording via cell to a data center for analysis and later viewing over the web.

How the Program Works

The technology is most effective when used as part of a full-circle program. The process involved in this approach is simple, logical and effective. Here are the key steps to applying the program:

- 1 Unsafe driving triggers the event recorder to record and saves the event. The video shows both what’s happening in front of the vehicle, as well as an inside view that shows the driver, passenger and whatever viewing is possible through side and rear windows.
- 2 At a specified time, the video data is sent via cell network to a central server.
- 3 Experts then view these video driving events and score them based on what risk existed. Events that meet a specified level of concern are tagged as requiring “coaching”.
- 4 Coaches are typically first-line supervisors. Coaches log into a database to see if they have any video events that require driver coaching. Coaching consists of meeting with the driver to view the video and discuss what needs

to change going forward.

- 5 Once the coaching session is complete, the event is marked as “resolved” in the database.
- 6 The driver returns to the field. If the coaching effort was successful, the driver will not trigger additional events displaying the concerning behavior. Additional follow-up with the driver occurs if further events are triggered and they reveal the behavior has not been corrected.

Coaching and Consequences – The Key to the Program

Key to the effectiveness of the video technology is coaching and consequences. Whether the driver is a person simply driving to work or the grocery store, a teenager heading to school or a party, or a long- or short-haul truck driver delivering products, the process is the same. Coaching and consequences.

Coaching as it relates to a fleet safety approach constitutes a brief meeting and needs to be part of an overall process. Improving driver safety and risky driver behavior is an ongoing, continual process.

In addition to coaching, drivers need to have immediate and certain consequences every time he or she exhibits a risky behavior. You need the ability to capture or observe the actual behavior and then tie positive consequences to safe and desired behavior, along with negative consequences to unsafe or risky behavior.

Positive consequences can take many forms, such as recognition and rewards. In some instances, a simple acknowledgment that a driver did the right thing, someone noticed and they cared is enough. These consequences should occur as close to the actual behavior as possible.

Like the positive consequences, the negative consequences must be administered in the same way. They must be as immediate as possible and certain. Every time the driver chooses to disobey the law or behave in an unsafe manner, he must know that it will be observed, it will be measured, and there will be a consequence. In most cases this is


Effective Fleet Management

a gentle reminder or coaching from a supervisor, peer or anyone who cares. More severe consequences may occur if the incident is extreme. Ultimately, you need a way to monitor the driver without riding beside him or her each and every day.

As a result, the solution has now been implemented in more than 700 units and continues to expand throughout the fleet.

“The camera doesn’t lie,” said the risk manager. “All the training in the world didn’t change our drivers’ behavior. It wasn’t

- Educate drivers on driver risk management—what it is and how it will help them perform their jobs more effectively and exonerate them in instances when they are not at fault;
- Regularly solicit feedback on the solution, highlight success stories in your



In almost every case, these risky behaviors were already present prior to the crash, they just hadn’t been isolated and corrected. The integration of video technology can have a dramatic impact on reducing the severity and cost of vehicle crashes.

Results

Rear-end crashes, side-swipes and intersection mishaps are very common incidents that lead to high claims costs and injuries. Most of these unfortunate incidents happen for a handful of reasons such as:

- Following too closely;
- Traveling at unsafe speeds;
- Distracted behind the wheel; and
- Seeing problems too late.

In almost every case, these risky behaviors were already present prior to the crash, they just hadn’t been isolated and corrected. The integration of video technology can have a dramatic impact on reducing the severity and cost of vehicle crashes.

In one city, the implementation of a driver risk management solution began with the fire department, which was experiencing a rise in collisions. The fire chief was being blamed for his drivers’ bad driving habits and collisions. Something had to be done. His drivers had received training, but it was, obviously, not a long-term solution. A driver risk management solution was implemented throughout the fleet and the results were immediate. Fewer collisions, fewer losses and fewer vehicles out of service. The solution was introduced to the city’s risk manager, who suggested it for other city vehicles.

until we could actually see what they were doing, coach them on eliminating the risky behavior and ensure that they improved did we finally begin to see a reduction in collisions. We could now take corrective action, provide additional training and take people out of their vehicles when necessary.”

The risk manager continued, “We began saving money immediately. Until driver risk management, we had citizens saying that we had hit them when we hadn’t. Now, we had the video clips to prove that we had not touched their vehicles. These exonerations, alone, paid for the service. And, in fact, allowed us to go back to management to get additional funding to get more units.”

An added bonus for this particular city risk manager? In addition to reducing risky driving, it also caught contractors stealing water from the city, helped convict a felon involved in a hit and run incident with a policeman and captured a shoplifting incident in progress.

Many risk professionals are learning that by controlling underlying risky driving behaviors, they can achieve substantial, sustainable improvements in employee safety. The keys to a successful driver risk management implementation are:

- internal newsletter, on your intranet and during monthly fleet meetings;
- Promptly review events with drivers and provide the proper coaching to help them improve;
- Follow up and reward improvement;
- Offer incentives for safe driving, i.e., not triggering the recorder = a bonus, vacation day, entry into a drawing for a prize, etc.;
- Share best practices and key learning with your entire fleet during monthly fleet meetings and in your internal newsletter; and
- Reinforce safety as a cornerstone of your organization; create a safety culture.

There is no question that driver risk management programs are becoming a crucial tool for the safe operation of fleets throughout many cities and municipalities. The risky behavior needs to be changed before driving risk can be significantly reduced. It takes quality training coupled with an effective driver monitoring strategy to identify and correct risky behaviors before they lead to a traffic collision. When you can predict it, you can prevent it. And that saves lives and dollars. ■

Del Lisk is the vice president of safety services for DriveCam Inc.