

TRUCK TALK

A Publication of
Continental Western GroupSM



MAY 2007

Safety & Health

Safety and health go hand-in-hand. They represent two of the most important aspects of a trucking company's operation. Yes, freight is important, but without safe and healthy drivers you can have all the freight in the world but if you can't deliver it on time and in good condition, what's the point?

Employees are an employer's most valuable asset. Workplace safety and health/wellness not only make good business sense but is a good employee-employer relations tool. We all know that vehicle crashes cost employers \$\$\$Billions annually in medical care, legal expenses, property damage, and lost productivity. They also drive up cost of benefits such as workers' compensation, Social Security, and private health and disability insurance.

However, no organization can afford to ignore a major problem that has another serious impact on both their personnel and the company budget: driver safety and health/wellness. The driver safety issue has a huge impact due to the fact that for the past 5 years motor vehicle crashes have been the largest single source of on-the-job injuries in the United States. Driver health/wellness has a huge impact due to the fact that according to the Large Truck Causation Study, driver impairment by the use of prescription or over-the-counter medicines was one of the major factors leading to "the first harmful event" in a crash.

Several factors currently have a profound impact on driver safety and health/wellness, one of which is an aging driver population. The past few years has seen an ever-increasing average age of the professional driver workforce, with an average age now approaching 50 years. These workers bring a lifetime of skills and experience to their jobs, making many valuable contributions to your company. However, employers need to be aware of how the aging process affects workers as the years go by. Medical concerns such as diminished vision, slower reaction times, declining hazard recognition, decreasing muscle strength, and restricted range of motion all have an impact not only on job performance but also the safety and health/wellness of the driver. While these physical attributes

do not affect a person's ability to work or drive, they may affect the ability to safely operate a motor vehicle. These changes are gradual and highly variable, affecting some drivers much more than others.

A wellness component in your company's safety program can assist you in reducing the risks faced by your employees and their families, while protecting the overall financial health of your organization. Your program should work to keep the driver and those with who he/she shares the road safe. If necessary, the program must work to change driver's attitudes concerning health, improve health-related behavior, and increase knowledge of a healthy and safe lifestyle.

Here are some tips for encouraging a safe and healthy workplace:

- Enforce mandatory seat belt use.
- Assign a key member of your organization responsibility and authority to set and enforce a comprehensive safety and health/wellness program.
- Promote worker health/wellness and safety through activities aimed at improving the general health of the workforce, such as exercise, diet, and smoking cessation programs.
- Assess driving ability through regular physical exams by trained health professionals, including stress tests, lifting capabilities, and range of motion.
- Provide refresher driver training courses, such as those provided by local community colleges.

Drivers need to do their part by making sure they are well rested, plan their routes, complete a comprehensive pre-trip inspection, and avoid hazards such as construction zones and inclement weather whenever possible.

The relationship between age, driving behavior, and health is complex and deserves to receive added attention from employers. Safety and health/wellness do indeed go hand-in-hand, and need to be addressed with forward-thinking programs that will improve the overall safety and health of all of us in the transportation industry.

Please watch for future editions of Truck Talk that will address the importance of providing a comprehensive wellness program for all of your