

TRUCK TALK

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Policies and Procedures – Lip Service or Operating Practice?

Human nature can be quirky – we tend to remember and concentrate on items that are at the forefront of our attention and downplay items that we are not reminded of. How many of us have heard during our ‘formative years’ “were you born in a barn” with respect to closing doors? Those constant reminders helped most of us form habits that we carry with us throughout our life.

In the ever changing transportation world that we work in, one of the few things that we can count on is the constant change of our environment – be that technological or regulatory. The majority of our insureds have created safety policies which document and clarify their policies, procedures, and the expectations that employees may have of the company and what the company expects of the employee. It’s a great way to get all requirements and obligations out in the open where they are available to all. This is an excellent process in theory and in practice – if it is practiced.

Over the last several years, there have been regulatory changes from the FMCSA in areas which address distracted driving and cell phone use. Many companies have incorporated the regulations into their company safety policies where they have become the ‘law of the working world’. The ink dried, the book was closed and many employers have been sleeping well every night knowing that all of their drivers and employees know these policies because they are ‘in the book’. As time goes forward, these rules move from the front of our daily thoughts to the storage bin at the back. And this is where the potential for problems can begin. Trained observers are beginning to notice that there are increasing numbers of commercial motor vehicle operators that are **not** using hands-free devices when talking on cell phones.

Most companies and motor carriers find it difficult to police all of their employees' use of cell phones because of the number of employees and the diverse location of those employees. Frontline supervisors, however, who talk with their drivers certainly know the difference in the sound of a conversation conducted with a hands-free device and without one. Occasionally asking of: "are you using your hands-free device?" can provide a reminder that the penalties for violation of this regulation are high (\$2,800 to the driver and up to \$11,000 to the carrier for repeated violations by employed/contracted drivers) and the costs, both financial and non-financial should the vehicle be involved in an accident, are certainly much higher.

Let's all make a pledge to remind our drivers (and our fellow drivers) that hands-free is not only the law of the land but also the policy of the company! It just takes a minute and could prevent both a citation and/or an accident.

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