

Accident Aftermath: *Terminate or Train?*

Determining what course of action to take when an employee has been involved in a motor vehicle collision is a common problem facing fleet managers.

The belief that punishing a driver for making a mistake or a driving error will prevent a similar occurrence from happening in the future has not been proven to be the best way to mold an individual's behavior patterns.

Generally the more serious the collision in terms of damage, the more stringent the penalty. A minor, first-time collision often results in a reprimand; a costly, major collision or a succession of collisions, in termination. As the severity and frequency of an employee's accident history increase, so does the punishment.

Since most traffic accidents are not intentional, it is not clear why the threat of losing one or more days' work is a meaningful remedy and consequently will minimize the likelihood of future accidents. Undoubtedly, the threat of possible loss of employment will make some individuals act with greater care.

It is necessary to apply punishment uniformly to all employees to avoid charges of partiality, favoritism, or prejudicial action; it should also be recognized that an employee's past history and performance should be factored into any penalty system. Unfortunately, many fleets apply the same punitive measures to a driver whether employed for five months or 15 years; whether considered a good "company" driver or a troublemaker with a poor attitude.

Analyze punitive measures by asking, what is gained as a result of the punishment? What is the employee's attitude when returning to work? Having been



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punished, will there be an effort to "get even?" When an employee is fired, is there any assurance that the replacement

will be any better?

It is generally agreed upon by fleet managers that most collisions are the result of poor defensive driving habits, carelessness, fatigue or a poor attitude (either ongoing or momentary). Fleet managers must determine the best and most effective action to take after a collision by figuring out which of the preceding was the proximate cause and then address that situation.

Here are some suggestions:

► Poor defensive driving habits can be identified through periodic check rides and addressed by both refresher and remedial training.

► In-vehicle training by a supervisor can often uncover poor driving habits that could eventually contribute to an accident.

► It is always beneficial to provide employees with periodic refresher training to increase their level of awareness. In this way, drivers are reminded of common hazards and are more likely to recognize them as they appear during the normal course of performing their duties.

► Ongoing negative attitudes are easy to identify and those whose driving is affected by these attitudes should be weeded out.

Momentary negativism caused by the actions of others often is extremely difficult to isolate and deal with effectively. When suspected, the discussion and identification of this problem can sometimes alert the driver to a previously

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unidentified reaction that contributes to accidents. Driver fatigue can be an individual problem or one common to the entire operation due to scheduling and/or supervisory controls. Unless identified and corrected however, fatigue-related

collisions will continue to plague an operation.

Driving performance can always be improved – even for good employees who have had a collision. Recognize that your fleet operation may run smoother with fewer disruptions if you can salvage and improve an employee who is basically competent but who has made an error in judgment.

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