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Emphasize the Importance of Safe Driving - Over and Over Again

You most likely learned to drive many years ago, and haven't looked back since you were sixteen. In fact, you probably haven't thought a whole lot about your driving skills since you first learned to drive. What is important to realize is that your driving abilities, or lack thereof, may have a tremendous impact on your safety at work.

The number one cause of death on the job is highway accidents, according to a 2007 Bureau of Labor Statistics study. Of the approximately 5,600 on-the-job fatalities in 2007, more than 2,300 were transportation-related incidents. In fact, many of the fatalities were salespeople headed to sales calls or someone out for an occasional trip in the company vehicle. Because of these grim facts, many employers are taking steps to reduce accidents by organizing driver's training for some or all of their employees.

Not only do car accidents carry a heavy price tag in terms of dollars, but they also take an emotional toll on employees. Although offering a driving course to employees is an expense for an employer, the training may pay off in the long run. For example, some insurance companies offer discounts to companies who participate in driver's training programs, which may offset those costs. Programs range from videos and workbooks to online classes, some of which are available directly from the National Safety Council. With the National Safety Council program, for example, employer's can track which employees signed up for the online course. This way, an employer can individually reward an employee for participating in the program.

Teaching safe driving techniques is by no means a new concept. In the 1940's, Harold L. Smith marketed the Smith System to help prevent accidents before they happen. More than half a century later, the five basics of The Smith System are still taught to help drivers make good choices behind the wheel. The company offers driver safety classes across the country. The five basic tenets of The Smith System are:

- Look ahead at least 15 seconds, giving you an opportunity to see a problem and make a decision before it's too late.
- Keep a 360-degree view of what is going on around your vehicle. Check mirrors every 5 to 8 seconds to update yourself on what is happening.
- Keep your eyes moving! Avoid staring straight ahead by looking around and maintaining your involvement in the road conditions.
- Maintain space around your vehicle to provide an alternate way out in the event of a dangerous situation.
- Seek eye contact with other drivers and pedestrians to make sure that you are seen in your vehicle.

Even if a formal driver's safety course is not offered in the workplace, some common sense tips on being a safe driver can still be emphasized. Fatigue and technology are both potentially fatal when combined with drivers on the road. If you feel yourself getting tired, pull over - plain and simple. Don't hesitate to ask someone else to drive or to locate a highway rest stop for a short break. In addition to fatigue, technology - cellular phones, mp3 players, PDAs - can be deadly. Don't make that important business call from the road, and don't try to jot down notes from a meeting. Stop and get off the road to attend to

business. It may be the most important stop you make all day.

Employers should also take the time to highlight the benefits of safe driving to the employees themselves. While safe driving skills obviously benefit the employer, they also benefit the employee personally through reduced speeding tickets and fewer accidents and injuries. The costs associated with emphasizing safe driving are quickly outweighed by the benefits to everyone involved.