

Driver security awareness for operators

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Every business needs to consider their employees' safety, and there's a lot of focus on road safety in the trucking industry, but not so much on driver security.

Truck driving is a complex task, yet personal security is often overlooked and drivers can become complacent. However, to improve driver security it is worth refreshing the company safety policy and refocusing on protocols associated with solo working environments such as the role of the truck driver.

Typically, every company should have a set of rules around how the driver should manage personal safety and have developed risk analysis solutions to follow to avoid any potentially disruptive events that may impact on a driver's personal safety. Bearing mind the vast majority of the driving task is done when the driver is by themselves, an operator's risk register should include risk cases for working alone and person-down.

Taking simple steps can keep a driver safe during both the transportation and the loading and unloading phases.

Let's start with a simple rule that goes without saying: **wear a seatbelt.**

Avoid the use of unauthorised digital devices from within the vehicle.

A lot of truck drivers use sat nav and mobile phones for navigation, and the latter for company and client communication as well. These are legitimate tools that support driver and vehicle security.

However, unauthorised devices may be monitored by those with nefarious intent. There is a possibility, remote though it may be in a New Zealand context, of a vehicle being tracked by persons, or groups, other than the employer.

Drivers should be encouraged to maintain regular contact with their dispatcher throughout the working day and dispatchers should be regularly monitoring vehicle location as a check that the vehicle is in a vicinity consistent with the day's work plan.

Dashcams

A recent trend is to install cameras almost everywhere, so the benefits of a dashcam should not be overlooked. A dashcam basically captures everything in front of the vehicle and more sophisticated versions can capture everything in the cab. These devices may come in handy in case of accidents and road rage incidents, but they also provide another layer of security to help protect the driver to some degree. Full surround cameras can be set up to monitor the whole vehicle, further enhancing vehicle and driver security.

Double check the route before starting out

When the driver is expected to go to an unknown destination, it's better to be aware of all the alternative routes.

For truck drivers, it becomes even more difficult since they sometimes travel hundreds of kilometres each working day and will have to make changes to their intended route because of client demands, or traffic conditions. The critical component of this aspect is the company should be able to ascertain quickly, if the truck has moved into an unauthorised situation. While modern GPS reporting and tracking should cover this off, it's always advisable to stay on the planned or expected route and not take any detours if at all possible.

Avoid unplanned stops

When checking the route for the delivery, make the planned stopping points the journey identified. The main advantage is that it will keep the driver and vehicle on schedule. Make sure your driving policy is clear on expectations regarding unplanned stops.

According to overseas driver advice, it's advisable not to make unusual stops on the highway, or on any road or route that the driver might be unfamiliar with, as there can be opportunists with questionable intentions toward the driver's safety or the security of the vehicle, or load.

Carry all documents

Make sure the driver is carrying all the documents that are required for the vehicle, including the license, registration, insurance, and the papers required for carrying the kind of load/cargo. It's always advisable that the driver keeps regulatory documents handy in case a police officer stops the vehicle to check these.

Transportation documents can be in an electronic format but drivers should avoid disclosing the nature of these ,or the load, to any unauthorised party.

Be safe when loading and unloading

Drivers should maintain regular communication with their dispatcher and the recipient of the goods once they have arrived at the loading or unloading site.

Driver safety is critical when loading, but more particularly when unloading.

Drivers should use common sense and observation skills to ascertain any unusual circumstances, such as individuals hanging around the load access area of the vehicle. For example, don't leave the keys in the vehicle and lock it if that's practical.

Opportunists will take anything if they see the chance irrespective of the value of the goods.

City deliveries are often potential hot spots for the theft of goods from unattended vehicles, but they are not the only place and industrial delivery sites can be candidates for thefts from vehicles as well.

Loading and unloading items can get very complicated. Drivers can get distracted and inadvertently drop their guard, so it's important to take care and maintain a high level of personal awareness and safety while loading and unloading.

Review your risk register and driver policies and check you have considered managing the risk case of "person down" and "driver under threat".

Summary

All in all, a truck driver's safety lies in the preparation before the trip and their attentiveness behind the wheel, as well as a developed sense of awareness to risk.

The most important thing is to consider the possibility of mishaps on the way so that the driver can prepare for the worst.

By virtue of the transport task, truck drivers are an indispensable part of society. For everything the general population has at its homes, the office, or anywhere else, the reality is that a driver with their truck got it there.