



# Driver safety management

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# Introduction.

Nothing is more important than the safety of your workforce. But the startling fact is that, despite its mundanity, driving is the most dangerous work activity there is.

## **The human and financial impact of work-related road accidents**

According to a study carried out in 2021 for Highways England and the charity RoadSafe, 29% of all road deaths and 21% of road casualties occur during a work-related journey. This means that every year over 500 people are killed in a work-related road collision, more than in other seemingly more dangerous industries such as mining or construction.

Aside from the terrible human cost of road accidents, there are financial costs too. In addition to the obvious cost of insurance excesses or vehicle repairs, there are many more hidden costs. An employee may need to take sick leave, insurance premiums will probably rise and there's a loss of productivity due to time spent dealing with the fallout from the accident. A conservative estimate puts the true cost of a vehicle collision at twice that of the insurance claim.

When it comes to operating an efficient and safe fleet operation, managing the safety of your drivers is clearly a top priority.

# What the law says.

Fleet managers are subject to a wide range of legislation relating to the safety of their drivers. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, all employers have a duty of care towards their employees and other people affected by the carrying out of business activities.

Furthermore, the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires employers to carry out risk assessments to identify potential hazards and then take measures to control those hazards.

Critically, these responsibilities extend to any private vehicle that an employee uses for business purposes— the so-called grey fleet. For more information on managing your grey fleet, read our White paper on 'Why you can't afford to ignore your Grey fleet.'

# Risk assessment.

The first step in the effective management of driver safety is the completion of a risk assessment.

The Health and Safety Executive Guidance on Driving Safely for Work says that the assessment should cover risks associated not only with the driver, but also with the vehicle and the journey being made.

When assessing the risk an individual driver might pose, the HSE recommends that factors such as the driver's experience, general health and fitness, prescription drug and alcohol usage, sensory impairments, and potential language barriers should be considered.

Driving licences, including any endorsements must also be regularly checked as this can indicate heightened risk.

Driver behaviour is also important when assessing vehicle risk as they are responsible for completing the daily walk-around checks, reporting defects and the safe loading of vans. Driver-related factors such as potential fatigue will also play a part in assessing the risk of individual journeys made.

Once hazards have been identified, the risk must be evaluated, recorded, and regularly reviewed. The HSE guidance has a link to a useful risk assessment template.

The completed risk assessment will help inform your written policies governing work-related driving. A driver's handbook or similar document that details employee responsibilities in relation to these policies should be read and signed by everyone who drives as part of their job.

# Training.

Research by the Department of Transport shows that only 2% of road accidents are caused by vehicle defects and the vast majority (86%) are down to driver error, particularly distracted driving.

According to the Department for Transport, distracted driving is a cause, either partly or entirely, in 27% of all fatal accidents in the UK. This makes driver training absolutely vital in establishing and maintaining fleet safety.

Providing initial training when a driver joins the fleet ensures they understand the safety culture of their new employer and are fully aware of the company's safety policies and their personal responsibilities.

Some form of refresher training would also be appropriate after an accident if licence points reach a certain level or when using a different vehicle or new technology.

Driver complacency also poses a real risk, especially for drivers covering a lot of miles. A study conducted by telematics provider Masternaut showed that 16% of business drivers report feeling 'invincible' when driving, claiming that they never consider their safety to be at risk.

Regular driving assessments can help address this problem and ensure that remedial training can be given as necessary.

Driver training also has a positive financial impact:

- Better drivers use less fuel
- Well-driven vehicles suffer from less wear and tear
- Accidents and repair costs are reduced
- Rises in insurance premiums are minimised
- Trained drivers feel valued and the resulting loyalty saves on recruitment costs

## The role of telematics in safety.

Whilst many fleets might use telematics primarily to track vehicles and manage fuel costs, it also has an important role in fleet safety. Telematics data can be examined in the event of an accident to identify potential contributory factors. Data on driving behaviours over longer periods of time can help identify a poor attitude to safety, such as driving at excessive speeds and harsh braking. Evidence-based individual feedback can be invaluable in helping drivers become aware of their own driving styles and any areas for change.

Telematics data can also be used as part of incentive schemes that reward good driving behaviour. League tables based on various driving criteria can be created and to keep things fresh, different aspects of safe driving focused on at different times.

# Reporting and investigating incidents.

It's sadly inevitable that accidents will happen, so a robust incident management procedure must be in place. Drivers must be made aware of exactly what steps they must take in the event of an accident, such as whether to move a vehicle or not and what notes and photographs to take. It's important to record details not only of accidents that result in an insurance claim but of all incidents, including near misses.

It is only by looking at all potentially dangerous incidents that lessons can be learnt, and more serious future events avoided. Underlying causes need to be identified and changes to procedures implemented as necessary.

# Effective communication.

No matter how thorough your risk assessments, safety policies and training are, they will not be effective without the buy-in of your drivers. It's vital to communicate and reinforce fleet safety policy on an ongoing basis. Nobody remembers everything in a driver handbook and you need to find ways to communicate key safety messages on a regular basis. Social media, staff intranet, email messages, online training, face-to-face presentations and meetings – there is a multitude of ways to communicate with staff and get their engagement. And it shouldn't be a one-way process – getting staff feedback and input based on their real-world experience is critical.

Following best practice in driver safety management will not only keep your drivers and other road users safe but will also reduce work-related stress, improve fleet efficiency and help control your costs.