

Ten-Minute Training Topics

Manager's Supplement - Distracted Driving

Introduction

We provide a “Manager’s Supplement” for Ten-Minute Training Topics that are:

1. likely to promote discussion,
2. invite controversy, or
3. especially critical to assuring safety within fleet operations.

This topic, Distracted Driving, fits all these criteria; therefore, we want to provide you with additional details that either could not easily fit into the space normally allowed for a typical Ten-Minute Training Topic, or would best be delivered to managers who can decide how they will introduce the material through company policies or practices.

Review of Your Company Policies

We encourage managers to review company policies that relate to the Ten-Minute Training Topic in advance of distribution of the training materials. This provides an opportunity to make any needed enhancements, prepare for anticipated questions and check to make sure that your policy and the Ten-Minute Training Topic are in agreement. (If they are not in agreement, point that out to your employees – your company policy always comes before any SafetyFirst training materials.)

We recognize that most companies do not have “formal policies” concerning “distracted driving”; however, your company probably has made specific statements about cell phone use, driving when ill or fatigued and avoiding road rage – all potential distractions to proper driving. Are the employees familiar with these policies? Have they read them lately? This is a great time to reacquaint them with these important practices.

Inattention versus Distraction?

We chose to highlight the differences between inattention and distraction in our bulletin to drivers. Some may question the need to distinguish these two categories, especially when “inattention” usually surfaces during many accident investigations (for workers compensation claims, too!).

This is an opportunity for managers to re-examine how their company’s systems influence “inattention” – are drivers called on to be productive behind the wheel? Do they need to engage in aggressive planning while they drive? Do you have a lot of two-way radio chatter or cell calls with drivers as they drive? Does your company contribute to the problem in any way that can be modified?

Additionally, there may be a tendency to become easily angered or frustrated with employees who have collisions where “inattention” seems to be the main cause. Challenge your investigators to try to find other contributing factors – was the

employee's mind simply off of the driving task, or were there specific "distractions" that could have been avoided?

Did You Know?

Did you know that cell phones are not the most common distraction to drivers? In a recent study conducted by NETS – the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety – on what drivers consider to be the most common distractions concluded:

- 70 percent of drivers routinely talk to passengers while driving
- 47 percent adjust controls
- 29 percent eat or read
- 26 percent pick up something that fell
- 19 percent talk on the phone
- 15 percent do none of the above

Respondents to the survey ranked drunken driving, aggressive driving and speeding as their top three concerns about driving safety – the fourth was "distracted driving".

Stories to Tell To Employees

1. From Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) – a sad story that occurred February 2002 near Washington DC that killed five people: "Dawn Richardson, 20, of Arlington, was driving her new Ford Explorer in rush hour traffic, using a cell phone to get directions from her boyfriend to his parents' home. She lost control and her SUV jumped a guardrail and hurtled into oncoming traffic, killing Richardson and four other people, according to police reports. The distractions, according to media reports, were numerous. Richardson was driving an unfamiliar vehicle; an SUV just purchased that day. She was driving in traffic during the city's notorious Friday evening rush hour exodus. She didn't know where she was going; she was trying to follow another driver. She was speeding. It was dark outside. And she was talking on her cell phone."
2. Associated Press - Tuesday, January 13, 2004 - A tractor-trailer slammed into a stopped school bus Tuesday, killing a 5-year-old girl who was boarding and injuring the girl's mother and more than a dozen other pupils. After ramming the bus, the truck hit the child's mother, who was standing nearby watching her daughter board the bus...[the truck driver] told troopers that he was trying to reach a cell phone on the floorboard of the 18-wheeler when it hit the bus, propelling it more than 100 yards through front yards of nearby homes.

These true accounts highlight how distractions can add up and cost the life of drivers in an instant.

Web Sites That Can Offer More Details

www.aafes.org

www.iihs.org

www.fmcsa.dot.gov

<http://www.trafficsafety.org/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2003-119/>