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Has Your Safety Effort Reached a Plateau?

So many times we hear from trucking companies looking for answers as to why seemingly sound safety programs produce flat results after a period of time. To fully understand this situation, one should profile those drivers involved in accidents.

Our experience in dealing with motor carrier accidents over the years tells us drivers who are new to the industry or new to the carrier will have higher accident frequency than the more seasoned professional driver. This is due to a lack of familiarity and in the case of less experienced drivers, a still developing skill set. However, these accidents tend to result in more minor claims from a cost or severity standpoint.

The more serious occurrences usually involve experienced drivers with at least 12 months tenure with the company. Additionally, the involved driver more often than not has a relatively unremarkable driving record and likely has not been identified as a higher than normal risk by the safety department.

One word can describe why experienced drivers have severe accidents and why good safety programs reach a plateau - COMPLACENCY. The longer an individual goes through life without incident, the more likely he or she will automate repetitive tasks or thoughts. In other words, the brain essentially goes on autopilot in the absence of perceived danger.

This can be a particularly dangerous situation in the case of a professional driver. Many who study complacency

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It can only be treated.***

feel it must be treated like a chronic disease. That means daily intervention. However, most company safety programs devote too much on reactive measures. In other words, the safety department tends to focus on drivers who have already had an accident or compliance problem. All the while, the apparent safe, trouble-free driver is becoming more and more dangerous as complacency takes hold. Keep in mind complacency can never be cured. It can only be treated.

The key to successful treatment lies with the integration of the operations department and, for that matter, any and every employee that has daily contact with drivers. These individuals are the first line of treatment for the chronically complacent driver. Yet, most companies overlook this vital link to the driver.

Dispatchers know what is going on inside a driver's head. They may also know about personal issues that are adversely affecting a driver's concentration. As a driver spends more time

thinking about issues outside of the actual act of driving, it is believed the brain automates more routine functions. Complacency takes over.

A stagnant safety program that has shown positive results in the past can actually dull participants into a false sense of security. Dangers become less of a threat. Again, complacency becomes the end result.

With the involvement of operations, maintenance and office personnel on a daily basis to deliver the safety message, we keep it fresh for the driver. We reinforce the fact danger is out there. However, keep in mind the message needs to be timely and current with changing conditions. Here are just a few ways to involve support personnel in your safety effort.

- Include support personnel in all driver safety meetings.

- If you don't have driver safety meetings, have them for support personnel.

- Keep support personnel informed on SafeStat and safety performance.

- Train personnel to effectively communicate with and listen to drivers.

- Set up a mechanism for support personnel to report suspected driver issues.

These are just a few ways to help treat complacency. For the full 10 Steps in Treating Complacency, please email jdavis@mtuinc.com and simply enter "10 Steps" in the subject line.