

How Truck Drivers Can Stay Safe on the Long Haul



Driving a truck can be a long haul – both literally and figuratively. The demands of the industry mean that American truckers work an average of 60 hours per week and cover over 100,000 miles of road per year!

To meet their tight deadlines, truckers often find themselves behind the wheel at or above the hours-of-service limits, pushing their bodies and minds beyond practical limits. In one study, an astonishing 37% of respondents said they exceeded their limitations and drove exhausted on regular occasions.

A major driver of safety non-compliance in the trucking industry relates to scheduling. 73% of drivers interviewed by NIOSH reported that they perceived their deadlines as being ‘unrealistically tight,’ pushing drivers to work through dangerous levels of fatigue, under-report injuries, and tolerate unsafe road conditions. Priorities in the trucking industry put speed ahead of safety, and it’s the drivers who put their life on the line.

The industry is demanding and probably always will be. If the tight timelines are here to stay, what can be done’

Trucking companies can improve their safety performance with a robust, comprehensive safety program including some of the following elements.

Safety Training for Truckers

Almost 40% of the truckers that NIOSH interviewed said that they received inadequate training when they first started driving. That means drivers are being sent out on the road behind the wheel of 26,000+ pound vehicles and learning as they go! If they’re lucky, the lessons don’t come in the form of a major accident.

This is symptomatic of a lack of commitment to safety at the management level. Truckers are hired as soon as they are needed and set to work ‘limiting their time under supervision and missing out on training in a controlled setting.

Management should provide resources and support for the safety program,

including standard safety training, on-the-job training, and mentoring opportunities. The training program should assess who needs what specific skills and training, and ensure that employees complete it.

(Learn more in [6 Steps for Designing a Training Program That Strengthens Safety](#))

Regular Inspections and Maintenance

A driver has to know a lot about the vehicle they'll be driving to operate it safely. Loads have to be within the capability of the truck and be loaded, balanced and secured in the proper fashion. All critical components have to be diligently maintained and inspected by a competent person prior to setting out on a long haul.

A comprehensive inspection and maintenance program should identify all equipment needing routine maintenance, and follow up to make sure it is completed.

Management has to support the program to make sure activities conform to its specifications at all times and not make exceptions the moment a tight timeline crops up. The time crunch is always going to be there, so the program has to anticipate and plan in a way that accommodates the ever-present rush.

Addressing Health Issues

Let's get this out of the way ' trucking is hard on the body! Truckers face a number of specific health challenges particular to their style of work and these accumulate in the course of doing the job for many years.

We're hearing more and more that extended time spent sitting is detrimental to our health, and truckers have no choice but to sit for hours on end. Office workers are advised to stand up and walk around at least once per hour, but that kind of advice is totally impractical to truckers, who stop as infrequently as possible.

Combine that with the fact that accessible food isn't usually the healthiest choices, sleep schedules are erratic, and getting enough exercise often proves impossible. Unsurprisingly, certain ailments like obesity, hypertension, and diabetes becoming endemic to the industry.

This is a tough nut to crack because some of these problems arise from the nature of the work. But that doesn't mean we get to throw up our hands and give up. Awareness can be a big help, from providing education about the risks of poor diet to implementing programs dealing with mitigating factors that may exacerbate health conditions (such as stress, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse).

(Learn about [9 Strategies to Promote Workplace Mental Health](#))

'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.' Maybe. But focus on the message. If you can convince them they will feel better if they take a sip, just maybe they will suddenly develop a thirst.

Broadly, this applies to any messaging in safety. Asking 'how can I make them do this' is asking the wrong question. Much better would be to ask 'how can I help

them understand that this benefits them”

Safety from the Top Down

Truckers have a litany of rules they have to understand and apply as second nature, but it isn't incumbent on the trucker alone to ensure safety on the road. Management has an important role to play in all of the above categories ' implementing and endorsing safety initiatives such as training programs, green hand programs, enforcement, inspection programs, and overall safety climate.

Managers can't speak out of both sides of their mouth ' saying 'safety first' then putting deadlines above everything else. Talk is cheap.

This requires a culture shift in the trucking industry and innovative approaches to scheduling and deadlines that really places a value on safety. Just saying so isn't enough; those in the safety profession have to help managers to understand the true costs of leaving safety in the tail lights. It isn't a blight to productivity; it is a necessary condition.

So, start ask yourself the key question. 'How can I help them understand that this benefits them”

Source: Safeopedia By [Daniel Clark](#)