

DRIVING - IT'S NOT JUST THE DRIVER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Though precise casualty figures have been unavailable until now, it is widely accepted that the most dangerous thing many people do at work is drive. Driver safety is becoming a priority issue and is seen as the employer's responsibility. Taxi employers and fleet managers will become increasingly responsible for road accidents and should be concerned with their drivers' safety."

As previously raised in these columns, there is a move towards bringing Health and Safety legislation into the arena of those who drive for a living. Driver safety incorporated into your own Health & Safety statement, risk assessment on route planning and driver training are all vital items to take on board.

It is noticeable that paperwork used by investigating police officers to log accident details now includes a section on whether the drivers involved were travelling on company business. Employers will be pressurised more and more to ensure they have done all they can to improve the safety of their employees who drive as a large part of their role at work. There is also an increasing threat of companies being prosecuted for work-related accidents. The changes affect all companies who operate fleets but will also apply to the taxi industry.

Road safety experts have welcomed the move, saying precise casualty figures have previously been unavailable. They believe the figures will be collated this year and a report outlining how many accidents involve 'at-work' drivers produced in 2006.

Although many police forces already investigate companies, the latest move means detailed records will be kept and studied, highlighting the true extent of the problem nationally.

Safety officials at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents have welcomed the move. As Head of driver and fleet solutions Charles Davis recently said:

'This will give us accurate information about the number of work-related road accidents and will be another warning to employers and fleet managers about the responsibility they have to keep their drivers safe.

'This will prove that this is the biggest safety issue facing the country. Consideration will have to be given to a Health and Safety at Work Act Approved Code of Practice on driving for work so that

companies will understand they will face legal action if they don't meet their responsibilities.'

Fleet owners have been warned that companies could face prosecution under corporate manslaughter laws if, for example, one of their drivers who was found to be at fault for an accident did not have adequate insurance.

Davis went on to say:

'More organisations are now getting to grips with managing occupational road risk, but far too many still pay no heed to what their drivers are doing out on the road. Employers have a moral responsibility to keep their driving employees safe by introducing safe driving policies, but also to safeguard the lives of people on roads around them.'

The problem of some companies not taking drivers' safety seriously enough was highlighted recently by the Government. Speaking at a ROSPA congress, Transport Minister David Jamieson said too many businesses still ignored what might happen to their employees whilst driving on company business. There is no doubt that the writing is on the wall. Driving will inevitably be judged as a Health & Safety matter.

Just like other work accidents, serious road accidents will require reporting to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and investigated and analysed by law. Unlike the current Road Traffic Acts the new laws will be enforced by the HSE.

THE ACTIONS THAT GOOD FLEET OPERATORS SHOULD TAKE

- Ensure full drivers licence details are obtained (and copy the licence) and checked before a driver ventures onto public roads. Also obtain references and closely check previous experience.
- Introduce safe driving limits, keeping the limits as low as possible with regular breaks.
- Communicate to drivers the importance of safety on the road and impose on your drivers a responsible manner to weigh up regular breaks with a need to carry out the business.
- Monitor the hours of driving done by individuals on a daily, weekly and average basis.
- Communicate external dangers, the dangers of taking 'staying awake' tablets for drivers who drive at night, dangers of alcohol and other substances, the danger of using a non-hands free kit while driving, and possibly providing hands free car kits.
- Develop and impose strict procedures and policies regarding safe driving practices. This could include severe penalties for speeding tickets or other fines or accidents.