

ENSURING FLEET AND DRIVER SAFETY: HOW TECHNOLOGY HELPS SERVICE BUSINESSES ADHERE TO REGULATIONS AND PROTECT EMPLOYEES

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Safety on the job, regardless of company size, is critical and should be instilled as a mandatory practice – not a convenience – especially for businesses with fleets. In particular, small businesses often lack the manpower for adequate supervision of employees, dedicated safety directors or fleet managers, and often utilize underdeveloped or are completely lacking formal safety training programs. Vehicle, or more specifically, driver monitoring can help close the gap between small and large fleets by effortlessly identifying problem areas using data and efficient reporting tools. These solutions offer "big" capabilities to smaller businesses without all of the resources of a larger entity.

According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), there were almost 34,000 fatalities on the road in 2012 and approximately 4,000 of those were attributed to commercial vehicles. Of the 4,000, the FMCSA found that, in about 30% of those cases, the commercial vehicle was at fault, ranking fatigue as the leading cause between seven and 15% of the time. In July 2013 the FMCSA implemented new rules regarding hours of service (HOS) and mandatory rest periods for certain classifications of larger commercial vehicles. While the FMCSA's HOS regulations only apply to drivers of commercial motor vehicles (CMVs), recent mandatory updates to drivers' available hours stirs debate around how much time is required for a sufficient rest period. This discussion shines a light on the fact that drivers of service vehicles, regardless of size, may be stretching the definition for what constitutes safe driving time during a single shift.

With this in mind, it's clear that fleet safety should be made a critical business value. Should an accident occur, a business can be held liable for negligence and hefty workers compensation claims, which can even lead to a potential civil lawsuit. Lawsuits can destroy any business, regardless of profitability, and can critically damage a company's reputation. In fact, the National Safety Council documents that the estimated cost of motor vehicle accidents is \$22.3 billion each year. Obviously there is also the human impact to consider when thinking about accidents that cause injuries to employees or the general public; however, when evaluating on a purely economic level the total cost of vehicle accidents can include:

- Lost time by employees
- Lost revenue because equipment is not producing income
- Failure to fill orders or meet deadlines
- Lost time by rescheduling missed jobs
- Lost time on accident investigations and reports by management
- Possible increased insurance premiums
- Possible increase for government audits and potential fines
- Public relations damage

A well-managed and safe fleet of vehicles can result in a more profitable business, better customer service and increased safety, among a myriad other benefits.

Technology Aiding the Creation of Safety Initiatives and Incentives

By implementing a fleet management system, businesses are differentiating themselves from the competition by providing a new level of safety, security and service. The technology collects data such as speeding, harsh braking, vehicle maintenance scheduling status, and vehicle location from a hardwired GPS receiver installed directly on the vehicle that transmits collected data via cellular communication to remote users.

While some tend to view technology that provides insights into driver behavior as an invasion of privacy, employees and business owners need to remember that this technology can help ensure the safety of all drivers. The technology can also be used to create incentive programs where employees are rewarded for safe driving behavior and adhering to safety regulations instead of being punished when they break the rules.

Incentive programs can offer employees rewards such as extra vacation days, cash or points that are applied to a leader board whereby someone is recognized as the safest driver of the month, for example. It's important for business owners to create these programs so that employees view the technology as equally beneficial to them, as it is to the business as a whole.

Revamping Guidance for Records of Duty Status

Within just the last twelve months, the FMCSA has implemented updates to the HOS regulations rolled out to all interstate drivers and also completed a final proposal which would mandate electronic logging devices (ELDs) be used by all CMV drivers. These bold guidelines are based on a need for focused safety on-the-road, upheld through more accurate and compliant reporting of driver logs. ELDs, proposed to be issued with the final ruling in early 2015, allow drivers to move away from paper logs and adopt new technology producing error-free electronic 'paperwork' to carefully monitor excessively long hours behind the wheel. Fleet management technology, specifically, allows for automated, accurate driver logs and reporting to mitigate the possibility that businesses or drivers are falsifying logs and turning a blind eye to marathon shifts behind the wheel. The revised guidance is intended to lead to greater compliance and safer roads for all drivers.

Reigning in Aggressive Driving

Part of implementing a useful driver safety program is ensuring the business can analyze objective sets of data that show whether drivers are engaging in risky behaviors or not. Running driver risk analysis reports are vital in helping to ensure dangerous behaviors, like speeding or harsh breaking, are quickly corrected. In fact, speeding is a factor in nearly 23% of all at-fault large truck crashes, according to the Large Truck Crash Causation Study (LTCCS). Fleet management solutions are useful in providing business owners a clear picture of drivers' habits and an opportunity to correct unsafe behaviors, which can significantly decrease the chances of being involved in a serious accident.

The Need for Driver-Centricity

Businesses should work with a vendor to put technology in place that pinpoints drivers, as well as vehicles, that are offending rules and regulations. This visibility can be used to put in place safety metrics such as harsh breaking, turning and accelerating, and directional turns and measure against them.

Visibility into driver behavior can also help businesses educate their drivers on the negative consequences in order to stem the amount of accidents that occur each year, enhance business reputation, and qualify for lower insurance premiums based on a safe driver record. These reports may protect businesses from customer complaints and potential lawsuits. The "tell me how I'm driving" stickers can be enhanced by fleet management technology that runs in near real-time and alerts fleet managers to unsafe driving events.

Fleet Safety as a Core Value

While the slew of driver safety benefits are clear, there are other advantages to using tools to monitor and enhance fleet safety. Those range from reducing the frequency with which drivers get lost in unfamiliar areas to signaling the unauthorized use of vehicles and aiding in the recovery of stolen vehicles and equipment, to allowing for quicker emergency response, reducing vehicle maintenance costs, decreasing payroll hours and facilitating greater employee and customer satisfaction. All of these things combined provide peace of mind to business owners and protect the bottom line.

Beyond the many aforementioned advantages of making fleet safety a priority, it is also the law for many businesses. The need to adhere to it has never been more vital, as the trucking hours debate continues to take shape and an escalating number of sleep-deprivation and other non-safety-regulated accidents occur. Fleet safety programs must be implemented by every fleet-based business and should be emphasized as an essential company value, rather than a nice-to-have business feature. Implementing safety programs can be seamless with the use of fleet management technology, which ensures a smooth rollout and an overall healthier organization.