

Save with Safety

By Matt Graveline

*The rules of the road are just the beginning.
Complete safety programs deliver the real benefits.*

As anyone in the trucking industry knows, fleets need to file a lot of paperwork to prove that they follow the rules of the road, and there are a lot of people watching to see that they do just that.



Auditors check logbooks to see if drivers are following Hours of Service limits. A Commercial Vehicle Operator's Registration (CVOR) rating considers things like collisions, roadside inspections, and the results of audits by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation. The activities of cross-border fleets are also tracked through the U.S.-based Compliance, Safety and Accountability (CSA) scores.

For some, just getting the paperwork done and getting that passing grade is the end goal.

But stopping at making sure you meet the minimum standard is missing an opportunity – and probably costing you money you don't need to spend. Fleet managers who want to prevent truck breakdowns, avoid heavy fines, or prevent collisions should be looking for more than a passing grade. Those who take a closer look at their paperwork and reports – and take a few steps to improve their records – will have the chance to fix problems before they grow out of control.

This is when the problems are easier and cheaper to fix, which means you will save money and look better to shippers, insurance companies, and other industry partners.

Many of today's shippers prefer to work with fleets that have better CVOR and CSA scores, and insurers look at the same scores when setting premiums. Some freight brokers are asking for Department of Transportation numbers and studying a fleet's safety ratings before assigning any loads, and government inspectors use the ratings when deciding where to focus their attention.

Using information to lower costs

The information is now available to anyone who wants to check it, and everything is posted on the Internet.

The good news is that fleet owners and managers are able to watch this information as well. Instead of looking at tickets, fines, collision repairs, or out-of-service trucks as single events-fleets can now see to see how each of these play a role in broader trends.

Most important, the information can be used to build effective safety programs – introducing the changes that will make a lasting difference.

For example, accurate, detailed and ongoing information about tickets can help fleets spot the drivers who need extra training or retraining, before any bad habits lead to costly collisions. A few hundred dollars invested in a defensive driving program might save tens of thousands of dollars in equipment damage and lost business. The information can also show if hiring standards need to be changed, or if road tests should be toughened to block poorly qualified job candidates.

Choose your business partners carefully

Many fleets hand work like this to safety consultants who focus on the minimum legal standards and only deliver reports every three months. Handing over this kind of control means the information may not be available

until the problems are out of control. Some consultants also insist on keeping all of the files, even though fleets are responsible for complying with all the rules and the paperwork that come with them.

The biggest risk of all might be that fleets are responsible for all of a consultant's mistakes, whether they involve poor driver orientation programs or outright errors in supplied manuals. I know of one Brampton, Ontario consultant who created driver manuals using the same information for every fleet. You could tell because the consultant often forgot to update the name of individual fleets in the manual.

The fleets that turn all their work over to consultants may also be spending more money than they need to pay. One company paid almost \$200,000 a year to three separate safety consultants who completed the same amount of work that could have been handled by a full-time safety manager at a fraction of the cost.

Skilled consultants and trainers can still play a role in a proper safety program, but they should be selected with care. This means asking for recommendations from industry contacts and other fleets.

If everyone involved in the process is willing to look beyond the minimum standards towards a real commitment to safety, a fleet stands a much better chance at finding real savings and all the other benefits that come from developing a reputation as a quality operation.