

ROOT CAUSES OF TRUCK CRASHES

Understanding the root cause of a truck crash requires more than understanding speed of travel, weather conditions, traffic conditions and driver or roadway conditions. While understanding these elements are essential to determine fault, there are several internal documents that must be examined to determine whether the organization deliberately placed the lives of their employees and the public at risk. Examination of documents such as training records and fleet maintenance will also help to discover the root cause of the crash which must be understood if a reoccurrence is to be prevented. There are other internal operating reports that must be evaluating to assess the root cause of a crash.

It is the author's opinion that the majority of crashes result when companies fail to balance risk with profit. Many companies are placing profit ahead of adequate risk management processes which include: an effective hiring process, adequate training programs and proper fleet maintenance.

Most companies have some sort of training and other safety programs in place that when utilized, serve them well. However, senior managers can become short sighted when achieving financial objectives and it is this short sightedness which leads to reduction in training, fleet maintenance and shortcuts in the hiring process, all of which create huge risk for the organization and general public.

Training programs which are essential in the prevention of crashes are often circumvented when hiring becomes difficult due to low unemployment or when absorbing large pieces of new business create new driving positions that must be filled immediately. Regardless of the reason, a driver should not be placed behind the wheel of a truck prior to successfully completing a training program conducted by a certified instructor. Meeting customer or organizational demands are not acceptable reasons to place the public and the driver at substantial risk.

Fleet maintenance is often neglected or extended to reduce expense. New trucks cited to replace worn out trucks are placed on hold and the worn out truck are held together with a "bandage approach" to repairs. These profits do not produce long-term success but some executives are willing to gamble that nothing will happen during this time period.

Truck accidents are also reduced by hiring qualified drivers. The hiring process requires the driver to meet basic requirements, such as 10 years of verified employment, no more than X number of traffic violations, passing a DOT physical, driver and drug test, etc.

All or some of these hiring requirements may fall short during the verification process. For example, how many times has a request for employment verification gone unanswered? How many times has an organization responded back with a comment, such as "Mr. Smith was terminated for 3 preventable accidents?" The response is seldom. Many companies do not furnish negative information for fear of reprisal. How many personal references listed give bad references? How many speeding tickets are issued locally with no record being sent to the state where the violation occurred? How long does it take one of the most popular drugs in use (cocaine) to leave the body after using? The answer is very quickly. Most drug users are aware of required drug testing so they simply cease using their drug of choice prior to drug testing.

Enhancing the verification process can be accomplished by training interviewers to detect deception during the interview. It is during the employment interview that the most accurate information regarding the applicant can be obtained. Who knows more about the applicant than the applicant? A well designed interview process will help ensure that a qualified driver is hired who will pose less risk to the organization.

These aforementioned basic actions will greatly reduce exposure and serve to protect the employee, the employer and the public. Balancing risk and profit are essential for long-term success at any organization.

Disclaimer: *This article is written for general information purposes only and is not intended to be and should not be used as a primary source for making security or safety decisions.*

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