

A Guide to Reducing Auto Accidents

Any public entity operating vehicles on the road in service of the community, has a responsibility for the proper maintenance and safe operation of those vehicles. Although auto related claims are typically the leading loss driver for most public entities these claims can be controlled by developing meaningful policies and programs regarding:

- Vehicle use
- Driver screening
- Driver training
- Fleet maintenance

This guide is designed to outline these four key elements necessary for maintaining and safely operating a fleet of vehicles.

Vehicle Use Policy

A vehicle use policy establishes an entity's commitment to the safe use of vehicles in its fleet by all operators. It should outline screening requirements, basic safety rules, disciplinary procedures and accident procedures. Requirements include but are not limited to:

- Minimum license and driving record requirements
- Driver screening-pre-employment and annual operator driving record check procedures
- Expectations for take-home vehicles and personal vehicles used for official business
- Expectations for safe vehicle operation
- Procedures for what to do in the event of an accident
- Expectations to limit distracted driving

Driver Screening

A comprehensive and well-defined screening process demonstrates a commitment to safe fleet operations. To protect the entity, it must encompass review of the driving records for all operators regardless of how often they drive. This should include:

- Full-time and part-time employees
- Volunteers, coaches, substitute teachers
- Board members, committee members, elected officials

To operate a vehicle or manage drivers, those screened must possess:

- Valid operator license issued by their state or residence
- Correct operator classification
- Current medical certificate (if required)

The department must establish:

- Periodic manager-level review of all current operator records
- A policy for dealing with collisions/accidents/operator mishaps
- Disciplinary procedures for violating department regulations/policies
- Rating criteria for violations found during screening

Driver Training

Establishing a consistent and well planned driver training program demonstrates an organization's commitment to mitigating loss and sets expectations for the operation of vehicles within its fleet. Training should be provided for full-time and part-time operators.

Training should include:

- Administrative rules and reminders: Vehicle Use Policy review, consequences for non-compliance with traffic rules, and consequences for at-fault accidents. Have a discussion of the types of historical accidents and the need to set an example for the community.
- Orientation: New drivers should have classroom and practical (on-the-road) training. All drivers should have established periodic review in the classroom and on the road. A more experienced driver should coach new drivers on vehicle operation and any unique exposures (railroads, dangerous intersections, weather, etc.).
- Vehicle-specific: The training for public safety vehicles should be substantially different for those driving sanitation, maintenance, heavy equipment, and other specialized vehicles versus general fleet cars and pickup trucks.
- Standardized elements: This includes the use of safety equipment (seat belts, harnesses, strobes, PPE, etc.), elimination of handheld devices while in operation, weather-specific driving information, and terrain-specific driving information.
- Remedial training: Any program should include corrective instruction for those with moving violations or accidents.
- Record keeping: All training should be thoroughly documented with dates, times, names of trainers, names of trainees, vehicles involved, and the types of training.
- Calendars: The training program should have standardized periodic refresher courses to maintain training and preparedness standards for all drivers within the fleet.

Maintenance and Inspections

A well-documented and implemented preventive maintenance program extends vehicle life, controls hazards, and minimizes potential losses caused by mechanical failure while mitigating risk.

1. Maintenance:

- Following manufacturer guidelines is critical when defending any potential litigation in the event of an accident.
- Conducting preventive maintenance at scheduled intervals and based on inspection findings or reports mitigates the risk of equipment failure.
- Using a fleet maintenance software program helps with scheduled maintenance and cost control. This will help with fleet management and potential vehicle replacement.
- Training maintenance teams properly allows for proper diagnosis and repair of specialty equipment.
- Contract our maintenance that you are not trained to perform.

2. Inspections:

- Implement a formal program including pre- and post-shift vehicle inspections.
- Document each inspection and any issues arising from those inspections.
- Immediately alert maintenance to issues.

3. Detailed record keeping:

- This helps protect against claims of unsafe, damaged, or improperly maintained vehicles being operated by its staff or representatives. Implement a system that can be easily accessed in the event of an accident and the records are called into question.

A number of elements go into the maintenance and operation of a fleet of vehicles and equipment. Contact Trident for more information and policy templates to assist with the successful maintenance and operation of vehicle fleets.

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