

Is Safety Policy Good Business Policy?

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Safety has been getting a lot of attention lately – even on the international scene. Distracted driving, hours-of-service for commercial vehicle drivers, teen drivers' texting and driving and killing themselves and/or their passengers and/or pedestrians, cruise ships running aground, airport runway collisions or near-misses are all safety issues making the news reports today. In virtually every case, human error is responsible for unsafe conditions. It seems that transportation in any form can be dangerous. Well, that's true if safety is not the top and *HIGHEST* priority.

Motor Vehicle safety officials are spending time and energy to alert the motor public in general and the business community in particular about the dangers of distracted driving. Everyone seems to think that distracted driving is dangerous, but according to a recent study, a majority of teen drivers believed that distracted driving is dangerous and they would not drive with a friend or somebody else who was texting or using a cell phone. But these same teens said they felt comfortable driving if *THEY* were texting or using a cell phone while driving. It is readily apparent: there is a serious disconnect at work here.

Distracted driving is only one serious issue among many that is currently getting attention.

Most people believe they are safe drivers. When asked, they usually answer: “Because I haven’t had any accidents.” Well, with that in mind, let’s take a look at the title of this article: “Is safety good business policy?” On the negative side, if safety policy were not a good business policy, what would your business (and your life) be like?

So, the answer to the initial question is: You bet!! Look at the scenarios mentioned in the first paragraph of this article. The very FIRST item on any accident review agenda is *safety*. A quick look at transport operations always starts with safety and training of personnel. We have laws and regulations that regulate safety of every transport industry for one reason: to reduce the potential for loss, either in life, injury, or property.

For example, railroad operations are regulated by the Federal Railroad Administration; airlines and airways are regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration; waterways and seafaring is regulated by maritime law, the Coast Guard, and International Maritime Organization regulations. Highway safety is regulated and influenced by several agencies: Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

Add to this the support agencies, such as the American Trucking Association, regional trucking associations (e.g., NHMTA and VTBA), American Automobile Association, auto clubs, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, etc. All of these play a role in promoting, and regulating, highway safety.

Some regulate by the court of public opinion (not to be confused with Judge Judy, et al) which often influences those who legally regulate the industry. When a disaster occurs, new regulations are created to reduce the potential for further incidents. There are other ramifications to consider: liability. Our laws of governance recognize a remedy for negligence or reckless conduct, making the employer legally responsible for the actions of an employee, and legally liable for damages. This is called “vicarious responsibility” and will impact your business operations and ultimately your insurance premiums.

The lack of enforceable policies and actions by employers can, and often do, result in personal injury or property loss. Needless to say, it is incumbent upon businesses to promote safety in the workplace and to take every measure to correct hazards that could lead to personal injury....not only because OSHA mandates that employers provide employees with a “safe working environment free of foreseeable hazards,” but because of the damage potential from huge jury awards against the company.

So, back to the rhetorical question: “Is safety good business policy?” The answer: “Safety is a basic policy for any business to flourish.”

Hundreds of trucks of all sizes ply our highways every day. We all know that not all drivers, professional or otherwise are not always courteous and safety minded. We have witnessed our share of unsafe driving scenarios. On the other hand, we have seen professional drivers handle their trucks with care for the other motorists. We have seen

these knights of the road back their huge tractor-trailer units into the narrowest of delivery alleys without missing a beat. And, we have witnessed the utmost in courtesy for other drivers. These are the drivers who adhere to their employers' strong and enforced code of safety.

Unfortunately not nearly enough is heard about the safe commercial vehicle operator who avoids crashes and helps others on the road. Behind every safe commercial vehicle operator there is a strongly worded company policy that is a guide to safe operations for all company personnel.

Almost every time a truck (especially a large truck) is involved in a crash (regardless of weather conditions) it invariably shows up on the nightly local or national news. Most often the company name is broadcast in the news report and sometimes the company's safety record and the driver's roadway history!! The commercial vehicle drivers who don't keep roadway safety high on their priority list are not safe drivers. They give the trucking industry (themselves and their employer) a bad reputation.

Make safety your business policy. It is the right thing to do and it may just help keep your company in business!