

# FLEET SAFETY BEST PRACTICES EXPLAINED

Fleet safety programs are comprised of a number of components that need to work together to be effective. By implementing them to optimal effect, fleets can see their risk profiles improve.



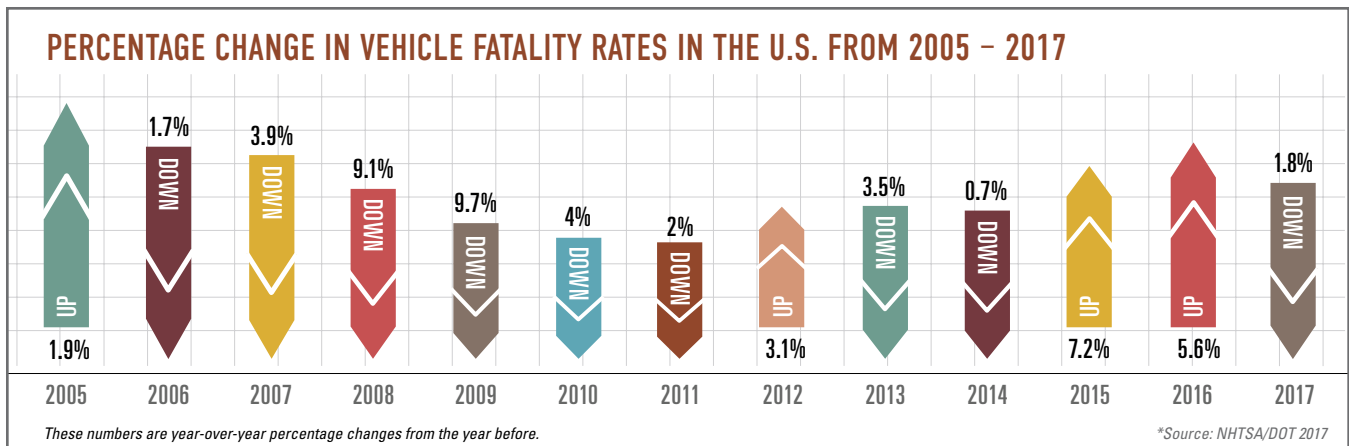
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While safety remains a top fleet priority, accident rates among most fleets have stalled at 20%, and even though the overall traffic fatality rate is edging down, it still far exceeds the lows earlier in the decade.

The need for comprehensive fleet safety programs has never been more imperative. Thankfully many fleets have implemented safety programs, but may still be struggling to curb their accident rates.

Most fleet managers know that they need to have a written safety policy that is the result of consensus with other key fleet and company stakeholders and that's supported top down and bottom up.

A potential stumbling block for fleets is not having a fleet safety policy that follows industry best practices.

Embracing today's best fleet safety practices is the key to success. This involves creating a comprehensive program that combines the best in monitoring, driver training, recognition, communication, and partnerships with fleet safety experts.

### The Keys to Success

As with every aspect of fleet management — safety strategies have changed with the times. It's no longer enough to just have a written policy that drivers must acknowledge and hopefully adhere to.

Today's safety programs should stress accountability, while giving drivers the tools they need to adhere to the policy.

### MVR Monitoring

While motor vehicle record (MVR) monitoring is nothing new, the way it is increasingly being used is. Previously, drivers would have their MVR checked when they were hired and, perhaps, once per year after that.

The primary reason fleets may check MVRs this infrequently is because, if a fleet handled the checks itself, the process was often laborious and inefficient, taking weeks' worth of personnel hours to complete — and required culling through both the reports of low-risk and high-risk drivers.

An MVR check — no matter its frequency — can identify high-risk drivers. However, infrequent checks may mean a risky driver has not been identified, and will likely increase the fleet's risk profile and imperil their own safety.

Over the past several years, fleets have had the ability to perform continuous MVR checks — usually through a continuous MVR monitoring service — which can identify risky drivers as they receive driving or other violations and alert fleet or driver managers in near real time. This allows the driver's infraction to be addressed almost immediately, meaning that the fleet's risk profile and its potential liability can be lessened, either through remediation or, in extreme cases, termination of employment. Because only the drivers who are committing infractions are being flagged — fleet personnel can focus on risky drivers who need coaching and additional training, making the process significantly more efficient and cost effective.

**37,133**

PEOPLE KILLED  
IN CRASHES ON  
U.S. ROADWAYS  
IN 2017

**SPECIAL NOTE, FATALITIES FOR  
PEOPLE DRIVING SUVs AND TRUCKS  
INCREASED, WHILE ALL OTHER  
SEGMENTS SAW A DECREASE.**

*\*Source: NHTSA/DOT 2017*

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Continuous MVR monitoring often serves as the foundation of driver accountability in the fleet safety program.

### Training

As with an MVR check, most fleets have a training program for new drivers, which usually involves a discussion of the fleet safety policy — with the requirement that the driver acknowledge that he or she has read it — often in a classroom setting.

Effective training should be frequent and varied, combining all of the various teaching methodologies — including classroom, behind-the-wheel, and online/at the learner's own pace — to make sure that training is relevant to the driver and matches his or her own learning style, e.g., experiential vs. classroom/theoretical.

Training should be conducted regularly either as part of an individualized remediation program or as part of a broader program if trending data shows a particular collision type is occurring frequently throughout the fleet, e.g., backing collisions.

Refresher courses for all drivers — again including all teaching methodologies — should be held on a regular basis. This is an opportunity to reiterate the fleet and its company's commitment to safety, address any changes to the fleet safety policy, and re-engage both low- and high-risk drivers in committing to the fleet's safety program and safe driving.

### Recognition

As important as it is to identify at-risk drivers and offer coaching and remediation, it's equally important to recognize those drivers that are exemplary examples of the program's aims.

As with training, there's no single way to reward and recognize every driver. Rewards and recognition can range from monetary bonuses to profiles in the company newsletter to a trophy or special jacket.

No matter the actual reward, recognition programs should be consistent and ongoing. For example, many fleets have used driver scorecards to "gamify" their rewards programs. The most successful programs have clear rules and defined gameplay periods. At the end of these periods, a new competition begins. This gives

drivers a chance to improve and get back into the game — keeping the competition fresh and exciting, and, most important, keeping the drivers motivated to be safe while on the road, on their quest to be named the safest driver.

A fundamental element of a safe driver recognition program — no matter the form it takes — is that it's public. A public reward, particularly if it's highly motivating, will keep the recipient committed to the safety program, and, crucially, inspire the winner's colleagues to improve so they can be in the spotlight and receive the prize.

### Communication

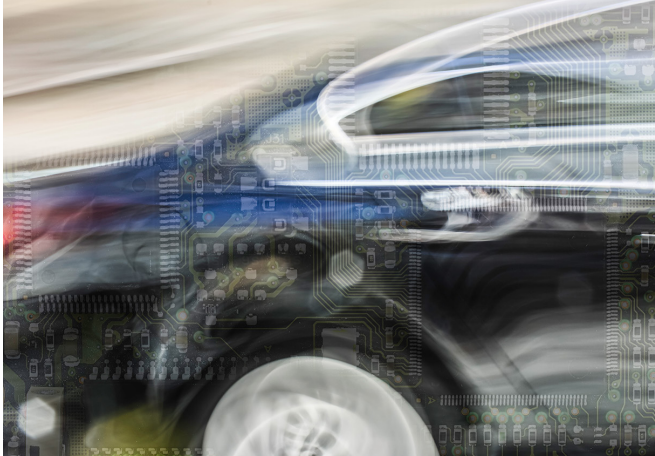
For all the accountability that is expected from drivers, fleet personnel must take the responsibility to continuously communicate safety messages to drivers to make clear that it is a priority throughout the company and is supported by company leadership. As with training and recognition programs, there needs to be consistency in the number and types of messages.

One of the benefits fleets have today is the numerous communications platforms available to get the message out. E-mail; the company intranet; social media (including, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or Instagram); texts; and traditional platforms, such as printed newsletters and posters in a breakroom can all be leveraged singly or in combination to get the word out.

No matter what platform or method is used, it has to be relevant to the fleet's drivers' working lives. Messages, too, must have immediacy and not be canned or boilerplate — specific tips for safe driving in winter weather (particularly related to the city or region where the fleet operates) or information about a new safety policy or the winner of the latest safe driving competition will likely be read, communicating important messages that will lead to high engagement and commitment to the message.

### Adding Technology

Available for more than a decade, telematics has moved beyond its formative iteration as a dots-on-a-map tracking system to a comprehensive monitoring solution that can help fleet managers and company leadership identify risky behavior as it happens.



Today's fleet management technology can be highly customized to the needs of the fleet and many solutions are designed to scale as the fleet or its mission changes.

Telematics and related fleet technology gives fleet managers the ability to hold drivers accountable through objective data. Without it, fleet leadership is figuratively blind — and in a position of being perpetually reactive; only taking action after a driver has gotten into a serious collision or other safety-related event. There is no ability to identify risky drivers and to create individualized coaching or remediation programs.

Often fleet drivers will push back against the implementation of a telematics solution out of fear that they are being subjected to Big Brother-type surveillance. Company leadership may push back because of the cost of the solution. It is important to answer both of these (and any other) objections to introducing telematics or any fleet management solution before implementation.

In this example, for drivers, it must be made clear that the telematics solution is being introduced to protect the driver and not spy on him or her. And, particularly, for safe drivers, it's a means to reward good behavior (see above). Of the cost objection, fleet managers should work with their provider to compile projected savings from using a telematics or fleet management solution. With the average cost of a single fleet-related crash at \$70,000, avoiding just one collision (and it will likely be more based on historic fleet data) will go a long way in paying for the cost of the solution.

Today's fleet management technology can be highly customized to the needs of the fleet and many solutions are designed to scale as the fleet or its mission changes. When determining the solution to

use, it's important for fleet managers and company stakeholders that the telematics or other fleet management solution will solve any immediate challenges *and* any future ones.

### Partnering with Safety Experts

When it comes to safety, fleet managers don't have to go it alone. Fleet management companies (FMCs) and fleet safety providers can partner with the fleet as expert consultants, and to help manage the safety and accident management programs, freeing up fleet and company personnel to fulfill the mission of the fleet without having to deal with many of the administrative burdens of managing the safety program itself.

Having this expert assistance will help streamline implementation of safety programs — focusing on best practices — and keep it going.

## KEEPING IT GOING

Safety programs should never be considered a “one-and-done” exercise. They need constant care and cultivation — and that is at the heart of all the best practices listed above.

The fleet's safety policy should be reassessed regularly, and engagement efforts with communication, training, and recognition programs should be re-examined and refined constantly. A fleet safety program that is left to run on its own will ultimately wither away.

The ultimate goal of any fleet safety program is to create a culture of safety that permeates everything the company and its drivers do.