
TITLE: FleetSafe - A Systematic Approach to Improving Driver and Vehicle Safety in Local Government in the Southern Region of Sydney

AUTHOR: Melissa Gibbs, Executive Director

ORGANISATION: Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC)

ABSTRACT: The twelve member councils of the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) together operate over 2,700 vehicles, with an estimated 5,900 staff required to drive vehicles either as the main aspect of their jobs, or occasionally as requirements demand. If we can significantly and continuously improve driver and vehicle safety in councils, a major contribution can be made to improving road safety on local roads.

With the assistance of the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority, SSROC has developed the FleetSafe program, which provides a framework for the 12 member councils to improve driver and vehicle safety for the benefit of staff, their families and the local community.

The goal of the FleetSafe project was to establish for each of the SSROC member councils:

- A model fleet safety policy that would significantly improve driver and vehicle safety
- Best practice guidelines that could be adapted to each council's unique requirements
- Guidance as to how the councils should go about putting the policy and guidelines into practice.

The project report provides SSROC councils with a model policy and recommended operating guidelines to establish best practice driver and vehicle safety policies and procedures. In addition, it provides the basis for other councils, and possibly other government and industry organisations to adopt a similar course of action.

Each of the 12 member councils have made significant progress on implementing the policy and guidelines.

INTRODUCTION

The Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (SSROC) comprises the twelve municipal councils in the south eastern part of the Sydney metropolitan area. The organisation was formed to develop solutions to the problems facing the southern Sydney region, and to focus and foster inter-council co-operation.

SSROC has a Road Safety Group to address the region's road safety issues. The group has co-ordinated a number of regional campaigns and programs to address issues such as pedestrian safety, speeding, driver behaviour and the like. Back in 1996, the Road Safety Group recognised the lack of a co-ordinated safety focus being given to the driving of Council vehicles.

WHY FLEET SAFETY?

In total, the 12 member authorities operate 2,700 vehicles, and employ about 5,900 people, most of whom regularly or occasionally drive vehicles. Given these figures, the Road Safety Group saw tremendous opportunities to prevent accidents, save lives and cut costs. The New South Wales

Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) has backed this up. The RTA data reveals that about 20 per cent, or approximately 800,000 vehicles are registered for fleet or organisational purposes¹. Of the total fleet vehicles, about 8 per cent are in government use. Fleet vehicles comprise about 50 per cent of total new vehicle sales, having risen from about 40 per cent in the mid 1980s².

As if the safety issues are not compelling enough, the SSROC Councils also identified potential cost savings. Together the councils expend over \$1.2 million in annual repair costs and nearly \$1 million in insurance premiums. On the basis of documented results in Australia and overseas, there is tremendous potential to save on insurance premiums, repair costs for below excess crashes, lost time and the like. Finally, legal responsibility for the safety of fleet drivers lies well and truly with managers and staff through the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1983. This places a duty of care on Councils for the safety of staff whilst driving Council vehicles, which are workplaces.

THE FLEETS SAFE PROGRAM

With this in mind, the SSROC Road Safety Group developed a proposal for a Safe Driving Best Practice Project, and in 1997 with RTA funding, SSROC engaged a project officer to undertake Phase 1 of the FleetSafe Project. The result was a report that established the current status of fleet safety in the twelve Councils and made recommendations to improve Council driving policy and practices. The report proved critical in convincing SSROC and senior management in the Councils that remedial action was required. Key findings included:

- Only one third of the councils had some kind of fleet safety policy or practice.
- Senior managers did not take responsibility for fleet safety
- Little, if any data was being collected, and very little analysis of accidents and their causes was occurring
- Safety was generally not a consideration in vehicle selection³.

With continued RTA funding, SSROC engaged a project officer to develop Phase 2. This involved working with the SSROC Councils to develop best practices to improve driver and vehicle safety in the total SSROC fleet. This phase of the program established for each of the 12 Councils:

- a model fleet safety policy that would significantly improve driver and vehicle safety
- best practice guidelines that could be adapted to each Council's unique requirements
- guidance as to how the Councils should go about putting the policy and guidelines in place.

The project report provides SSROC Councils with a model policy and recommended operating guidelines to establish best practice driver and vehicle safety policies and procedures. In addition it gives the RTA a model for other Councils and possibly other government and industry organisations to adopt a similar course of action.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

One of the fundamental principles underpinning the development of FleetSafe was the need for all member councils to be fully involved throughout to ensure ownership of the outcome. To this end, two groups were formed comprising representatives of all Councils.

A *FleetSafe Steering Group* comprised of director level managers guided the project. (Directors operate one level below the general manager.) The FleetSafe Steering Group was tasked to provide senior management backing and to give advice as to implementation issues. The second group, the *FleetSafe Working Group* comprised middle managers and subject experts to provide technical input. This group worked with the project officer to develop the detailed policy and guidelines, providing much of the substance to the policy and ensuring its practicality, relevance and credibility. Both the

¹ RTA registration database, 30 June 1999

² "Black and White Data Book" 1999

³ FleetSafe – Fleet Safety and Local Government in the Southern Sydney Region (SSROC)

Steering Group and the Working Group were representative of a range of disciplines, including fleet management, insurance and risk management, occupational health and safety and human resources.

Throughout the project, elected officials (mayors, councillors) and Council general managers were kept informed about the project and their assistance obtained where relevant. In addition, a Focus Group was convened early in the project. The aim was to involve a representative sample of drivers of all kinds of vehicles from all Councils in recommending fleet safety solutions particularly for improving driver behaviour. This group was re-convened near the end of the project to review and comment on the draft report.

The Executive Director of SSROC is managing the FleetSafe project on behalf of the 12 member councils. Following the release of the Phase 2 FleetSafe report the focus has switched to implementation. FleetSafe is all about commitment to achieving real cultural change in the member Councils. To achieve road safety outcomes, changes to management processes are vital, and cultural changes will never be achieved without management commitment and support.

To this end, the SSROC Executive Director continues to manage the process, by convening regular meetings of responsible staff at middle management level. At the meetings, convened every two months, each member provides a progress report. The members know they are expected to report to the meeting, so there is gentle pressure on all members to ensure they have some implementation news to share with their peers. The RTA continues to support the project by assigning a project officer to advise and assist the councils to implement the policy.

THE FLEETS SAFE REPORT

The FleetSafe report provides Councils with a framework to use in establishing the new safe driving ethos. Much effort was put into ensuring that the report is easy to read. Photographs of real situations in real councils with real employees, and cartoons to communicate key concepts permeate throughout. The report contains two key sections: the model policy, backed up by detailed guidelines. The report is a practical guide, and contains an implementation plan and practical resources to aid implementation, such as:

- data collection forms
- model reports
- model survey and questionnaire forms

The model Policy covers five key areas:

Accountability – gaining management commitment by making a senior manager responsible for program implementation, and by making line managers and staff responsible for vehicle costs and vehicle operation.

Occupational Health and Safety – reinforcing the concepts of the vehicle as a workplace under the relevant legislation, and bringing the provisions of the Act to bear on managers and staff in relation to driver competency, ensuring the safety of vehicles and that vehicles are being operated and maintained safely.

Safer Drivers – establishing effective measures to educate, train and motivate staff to adopt appropriate safe driving practices, eventually leading to modification of driver behaviour.

Safer Vehicles – enhancing vehicle safety to ensure a minimum safety standard for vehicles from the initial purchase, during the life cycle of the vehicle, and at sale or changeover.

Evaluation – ensuring data is being collected from the beginning of the program, that the data is regularly reported to senior management, leading to eventual benchmarking of performance between the councils and beyond.

The operating guidelines specify the detailed activities each Council could employ to implement the FleetSafe policies. The guidelines are very detailed, and include suggested formats for data collection as well as examples of operational forms. For example, where FleetSafe talks about vehicle operation, the guidelines provided detailed procedures for:

- The initial handover to the designated driver (pointing out safety features, demonstrating vehicle handling characteristics, outlining maintenance needs, etc.).
- Vehicle presentation, including a schedule for regular safety and care inspections.
- Breakdown procedures, including a model accident response kit to be placed in the glovebox.
- Accident reporting procedures.

The FleetSafe report also contains a recommended implementation plan, detailing actions step by step.

All Councils have multiple copies of the report for implementation. It is also available on the SSROC website at www.ssroc.nsw.gov.au. Councils are also able to access the report on disc to facilitate easy access to the text for ease of implementation and reporting. SSROC strongly encouraged Councils to adopt the policy and guidelines without change. However it is acknowledged that modifications may be required to suit individual Council requirements.

IMPLEMENTATION

Each of the 12 member Councils of SSROC have tackled implementation of FleetSafe in their own way. Some of the Councils are systematically working their way through the policy and guidelines, tackling each component in turn and seeking endorsement from the senior management team as they progress. Others have integrated FleetSafe into other fleet and safety programs, treating the issue as a responsible management measure and not a discrete program. One has developed a separate FleetSafe business plan as part of the Council's management plan. The Councils themselves are in the best position to judge how implementation should be approached. The most important thing is that each of the 12 Councils is off the starting block and making fine progress.

CONCLUSION

Adopting a systematic approach to improving driving safety in the workplace offers road authorities a very effective means to influence the number and severity of crashes. In the southern area of Sydney alone, Councils are in a position to influence the driving behaviour of 5,900 drivers who regularly or occasionally drive Council-owned vehicles as part of their work duties. It is not unrealistic to expect that with an additional 5,900 drivers on Sydney's roads who have developed safer driving practices and heightened road safety awareness through their workplace vehicle safety program, we may be able to prevent accidents, save lives and cut costs.