

UK Fleet Operators Failing to Implement Basic Road Safety Policies

by Dr Will Murray, Research Director, Interactive Driving Systems (IDS), UK-Australia-EU-USA

There has been an increasing amount of discussion on fleet safety in the UK in recent months, in part caused by the proposed Corporate Manslaughter and Road Safety Bills, as well as changes to Police and HSE reporting requirements on fleet vehicles.

Recent research studies in the UK have focused specifically on the fleet safety policies that organisations have in place.

Towards the end of 2004, Nottingham Business School's Centre for Automotive Industries management found that only 31% of the fleets in its survey had a written fleet safety policy in place.

A study by the Royal Automobile Club in early 2005 put this figure at 60% of fleets

More recent findings published on the internet suggest that 79% of companies have no fleet risk management strategy in place.

Clearly there are some conflicting figures coming out from these surveys. For this reason we at Interactive Driving Systems decided to undertake our own research on this issue, based around three questions.

1. Do you have a written fleet safety policy in place?
2. Is the policy reviewed, improved and updated annually?
3. Do you check your drivers' knowledge of the policy?

The latter two questions were felt to be important because having a policy is a good starting point – but living, breathing and making the policy work for you is better!

The survey was posted on our internet site at www.vfrm.net and was responded to by 242 fleet managers. Of these:

- 70% have a written fleet safety policy, 30% don't.
- 49% update the policy annually, 51% don't.
- Even less, 41%, check their driver's understanding and application of the policy, 59% don't.

IDS CEO Ed Dubens said: 'These results suggest that although almost three quarters of respondents had a policy, less than half of them reviewed and updated it on a regular basis and that almost two thirds of them did not bother to check whether their people were aware of, understood or applied the policy'.

Dubens continued: 'This led us to believe that there are some clear gaps between organisational policies – what they say and procedures - what they actually do. This suggested that we should import one of our successful US tools into the UK'.

Risk Foundation is a tool to help organisations take the step from having the policy to making it an integral part of their 'crash free culture' program. To develop a Risk Foundation solution, we work closely with each client to turn their Health and Safety and Road Safety Policy and Procedure Manuals into 45 question assessments of the most safety critical issues for drivers.

The objective of the assessment is to create a critical mass of knowledge amongst employees who drive for work purposes about the key policies and procedures designed to keep them safe at all times.

Following the launch of this new service to a number of clients earlier this year, the key benefits have been identified as:

Significant reductions in the number of 'I was not aware of that' excuses.

Much greater awareness of company policy and procedures.

Better understanding by management of the operational implications of key policies and procedures.

Creates a Management Review process to update, clarify and/or rewrite key policies and procedures not being used or monitored.

Risk Foundation is designed to be updated and retaken every 12 months by everyone driving for work purposes, to keep them up to date on changes in working practices and legislation that may impact on certain policies and procedures. The extensive management information system that sits behind Risk Foundation also ensures that the policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated by managers — as well as ensuring that drivers read and understand them.

New drivers are tasked with completing their Risk Foundation Assessment before finishing their induction/orientation program.

According to Dubens: 'this is a massive step forward in terms of converting organisations' existing, but often 'dead', fleet safety policies into a living, breathing fleet safety process'.

New Case Studies

Ten new case studies of our successful programs in the UK, Australia and the USA have been written up on the internet. These cases provide useful, practical and proven ideas that other fleets can learn from and implement. Car, truck, van and bus fleets are included and can be found at www.vfrm.com/casestudy.php. Several other successful fleet safety programs and trials can also be seen at www.idsholdings.com/news.php.