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Driver Behavior Monitoring:

The Key to a Safer Fleet

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Data compiled by Automotive Fleet suggests that more than 20% of all fleet vehicles are involved in accidents every year—and the majority of these accidents are related to preventable driver behaviors. Preventable accidents cost U.S. employers billions of dollars in direct and indirect costs annually.

Given this reality, the business case for implementing a driver safety program to reduce accident rates is clear. However, many employers find it difficult to change entrenched driving habits and struggle to establish and implement effective driver safety programs that result in significant savings.

“One of the root problems is that most organizations simply don’t know how to go about implementing an effective driver safety program.”

Ad-hoc efforts such as sending out a memo about driver safety policies or rehashing basic training techniques are unlikely to have a significant impact on established driving habits.

Even with a basic vehicle monitoring system in place, an organization may not have all the tools it needs to drive significant improvements in safety and financial performance. Merely knowing vehicles’ locations isn’t enough—managers need detailed insight into driver behavior patterns to identify unsafe habits and take appropriate corrective actions.

An effective driver safety program requires top-to-bottom alignment on safety objectives and the technological capability to monitor driver behavior, together with real-time analysis, feedback, and coaching.

This white paper analyzes the key steps organizations need to take to implement an effective driver safety program, in order to initiate a broader cultural shift that makes driver safety a priority at every level of the organization.

Choosing the Right Technology

Fleet managers need more than a basic vehicle tracking system—they need a comprehensive set of tools to monitor driver behavior and provide rapid feedback and coaching.

Here are four essential features of an effective solution:

- In-Vehicle Monitoring with Driver Feedback
- Individual and Fleet-Wide Driver Behavior Reports
- Real-Time Alerts
- Dashboard Analysis

In-Vehicle Monitoring with Driver Feedback

Driver behavior monitoring is the foundation of an effective safety program. The first step towards a safer fleet is to become aware of which unsafe practices and habits are taking place, when they take place, and which drivers are responsible. But having a monitoring system in place isn’t enough. The system must also provide immediate feedback—ideally right in the cab of the

vehicle itself—that calls drivers' attention to their behavior so that they can recognize and correct unsafe habits.

For instance, if a driver accelerates too quickly, stops suddenly, corners too fast, exceeds the posted speed limit, or allows the vehicle to idle too long, they should receive an audible alert at the moment of the violation. During their safety training, they will learn the meaning of the alerts and how to adjust their behavior. They will also know that management has been notified of their unsafe behavior. All of this helps to drive greater awareness of road safety, which is a critical first step in getting drivers to change unsafe behaviors.

In addition to audible alerts, it is helpful to have a system with a hands-free, two-way messaging feature that allows safe, fast, and simple communication between drivers and the central office. With this functionality, organizations can keep mobile workers connected while discouraging them from using cell phones behind the wheel—simultaneously supporting productivity and safety.

Every business has unique needs, goals, metrics for benchmarking, and cultural concerns, so flexibility is an important feature in driver behavior monitoring solutions. Management should have the ability to set specific thresholds for safety violations depending on the type of vehicle involved and the nature of the work being performed. For example, the driver of an emergency medical response vehicle should not be penalized for speeding when responding to an emergency.

Driver Behavior Reports

The ability to identify and track **individual drivers**—as opposed to only vehicles—and to keep an ongoing record of each driver's behavior is essential. Without individualized data, it will be much more difficult to detect and address patterns of unsafe behavior. An optimal monitoring solution will provide fast, simple ways for drivers to login using either onboard hardware or a mobile app, or to be assigned to vehicles through the application software.

With a system that provides individual driver behavior reports, management can identify both the safest and the most risky drivers, and implement incentives or corrective measures based on the established standards of the driver safety program. Having thorough documentation of unsafe behavior can prove especially critical when organizations are compelled to take serious disciplinary action against dangerous drivers—or when they are threatened with lawsuits or required to testify about their involvement with accidents.

Management also needs visibility into **fleet-wide performance** to maintain organizational safety standards and work towards goals for improvement. Organizations should select a behavior monitoring system that can automatically track key performance indicators and deliver on-demand access to the data through an integrated dashboard. With these tools, management can set a baseline for the safety program, compare driver performance, monitor trends to track progress over time, and take any additional steps necessary to address lingering safety issues.

Real-Time Alerts

Analyzing after-the-fact reports can help managers track behavioral trends over time, but real-time information is critical for correcting unsafe behaviors. In-cab audible notifications can provide immediate feedback to drivers, and alerts empower managers to follow up on safety concerns with coaching or additional training. If vehicles are not equipped to deliver in-cab notifications, alerts are the only practical way to provide (near) realtime feedback.

Intuitive Dashboards

It needs to be fast and easy for managers to analyze driver behavior and detect key performance trends and “outliers” (those performing outside of acceptable standards). An optimal monitoring system will save the organization time by automatically tracking individual and fleet-wide performance metrics and making relevant data available in an accessible, easy-to-use dashboard that can be customized.

Key Considerations When Implementing a Driver Safety Program

The effectiveness of any driver safety program depends largely on how well management is able to create a culture that prioritizes driver safety. Without the visible commitment of management—and active employee engagement—even the most thoroughly considered program is unlikely to produce the desired results.

Here are the three phases of the successful implementation of a driver safety program:

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Phase 1: Secure Leadership Commitment to Driver Safety

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Phase 2: Set Goals, Engage Employees, and Deploy Technology

3

Phase 3: Sustain the Culture of Driver Safety

Phase 1: Secure Leadership Commitment

The first stage involves defining the challenge—and committing the resources required for success. Leadership figures at all levels of the organization must reach an agreement on the strategic importance of the safety program and the long-term value it will provide to the company. To help solidify the organizational commitment to the program, it is helpful to create a multi-disciplinary committee to oversee the implementation. Forming a committee that includes drivers and employees from various departments helps provide multiple perspectives and creates a sense of ownership that will support the desired cultural shift.

Phase 2: Set Goals, Engage Employees, and Deploy Technology

After gaining alignment on the objectives, it is time to design and implement the driver safety program. Here are the essential steps involved with developing and introducing the plan to employees:

- **Review existing safety policies and procedures** – Before creating the new program, it helps to assess where the organization is and which areas need improvement. To do this, leadership must take a close look at existing safety

policies, as well as any applicable regulatory compliance requirements.

- **Define and Set Goals** – After evaluating the current situation, it's time to set goals for improvement. The specific objectives of the safety program will help to determine what technical capabilities are required for success. For example, if hard braking and fast cornering are persistent problems, the organization will need a solution that can capture and report these events.
- **Draft new safety policies and procedures** – The newly written policies and procedures must be clear and concise. Management and staff will rely on these documents for guidance throughout the life of the program.
- **Select a behavior monitoring solution** – An organization's technical requirements will vary depending on its goals. The chosen solution must provide all of the monitoring, reporting, and communication tools necessary to support the organization's updated safety policies.
- **Communicate the new standards and the benefits of increased safety** – The importance of this step cannot be overstated. How the program is presented to the drivers and other employees plays an enormous role in their acceptance of the program and their commitment to changing their behavior. If they understand and agree with the organization's goals, they'll be more likely to support the changes.
- **Provide thorough training to employees** – Every employee in the organization—not just the drivers—must receive training. In addition to understanding the new policies and procedures, employees must also learn how to use the newly implemented technology effectively. The provider of your driver monitoring solution should have training programs available to help you with this step of the process.
- **Reinforce Safe Driving Behaviors** – Adherence to new safety policies should be incorporated into the organization's formal performance review criteria to make it clear to drivers that safety is an organizational priority. Offering incentives to reward safe behavior can help to keep the issue alive in drivers' minds as they go through their daily routines.
- **Manage employee resistance** – Behavioral change is difficult and some degree of employee resistance to new standards and oversight should be expected. Including employees in the planning and implementation process will help improve transparency and secure buy-in. Inclusion also gives employees a channel to communicate their concerns in advance, so the program leaders can proactively seek solutions.

Phase 3: Sustain the Culture of Driver Safety

Establishing safety as a top organizational priority is an ongoing process. With access to both individual and fleet-wide driver data through an intuitive dashboard, management will be able to assess progress over time relative to established benchmarks and refine their objectives, policies, and improvement strategies as needed. Managers will have easy access to the data and documentation they need to identify individuals or groups that continue to display unsafe habits. A mix of performance evaluations, personalized coaching, and incentives can help these drivers change their behavior over time.

Implementing a driver safety award program is one of the most effective ways to sustain and build a culture of driver safety. It also reinforces safe driving behavior by sending the message that safe driving benefits the driver and the organization.

Awards can include monetary prizes, gift certificates, or other unique tokens. Public recognition on the company's website or in a newsletter or annual report also helps support the safety program's success. When developing a driver safety award program, it's wise to continue devoting the same level of attention to employee inclusion that was given during the program design.

Towards a Safer (and More Profitable) Fleet

Safety programs need to be tailored to the unique business needs and culture of the organization to be effective. Generic, one-size-fits-all approaches won't change entrenched driving habits, and won't produce the expected cost savings. Organizations need to ensure that they are creating an environment in which safety is truly viewed as a priority.

Managing and sustaining a comprehensive cultural shift towards valuing safety requires employees to change ingrained behavior, which is easier said than done. But with the right technology solution applied to the task, it becomes much more achievable.

Once an organization has committed to making driver safety a priority, it's time to start selecting a behavior monitoring solution. A "bare bones" system that only includes basic tracking and reporting features may be adequate for some. However, to reach their safety goals, many organizations will need a more advanced solution that provides individual and fleet-wide data tracking, analytics, and advanced feedback and communication tools.

Organizations should ensure that the technology provider they select is capable of providing these critical capabilities, as well as any additional features needed to meet their specific performance goals.

Citations

- ¹ Automotive Fleet. Annual Accident Management Survey. 2013.
- ² OSHA. "Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes."