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News

Keep on truckin' - safely

6 Feb 2015 What distinguishes a trucking company with a good safety record from one that performs poorly on safety? That's the question which has focused the mind of UNSW academic Lori Mooren.

Mooren's research is partly funded by Zurich Insurance Australian Limited, the go-to insurer for the transportation and logistics industry. She shared some of her findings at Zurich's Road Safety Forum for customers held recently in both Sydney and Melbourne.

Transport employers proactive in managing road risks

'Heavy vehicle fatalities have decreased by 32% over the past decade,' says Mooren. 'The trucking industry is one where employers know that there are serious risks to their employees, to their cargo and to their business in using the road. They have been a lot more proactive than most employers in managing risks of using the road.'

As Mooren knows, road safety is a huge issue for businesses across the board, not just the trucking industry. 'Of all work fatalities, 67% are vehicle related. That's not surprising when you think about it. There are lots of other workplace accidents but when you have a vehicle incident, it's such a violent event that the injuries are pretty severe.'

Company vehicles crash more often than private vehicles

The other figure that is quite disturbing is that a person is 50% more likely to crash in a company vehicle than a private vehicle. Why?

'When people don't own their own vehicle, they don't treat it as well. When they are travelling for work, they are often doing things like talking on a mobile phone, or they are in a hurry. The combination of distractions, speed and sometimes fatigue, are some of the reasons,' says Mooren.

She notes, however, that employers can strongly influence the safety of vehicles and cites the example of BHP Billiton which last year started purchasing passenger vehicles only with five-star safety NCAP ratings.

Managers' commitment to safety positively affects crash rate

Mooren's research in the trucking industry has shown that the 'safety culture' of the particular business affects the crash rates. 'You can measure things like the perception that workers have that their bosses are committed to workplace safety above other objectives. It's a demonstration of clear commitment and a sense 'safety is the way we do things around here'. When you have that culture of safety, then crash rates are likely to be lower.'

The converse is also true. 'A lot of research has found that some employers haven't fully embraced the problem of crashes. There is the attitude that someone else manages road safety, whether it's the police or road authorities, and it's really up to them to get people to follow the rules of the road. These employers are not owning the problem,' says Mooren.

In terms of the companies which have got on board with road safety, Mooren says that Dupont is a stand-out. 'They've always tried to encourage education of their employees' families, as well as the employees themselves, about road safety and other safety issues.'

Regular wages for drivers positively affect fatigue

Another significant factor for truck safety is the pay system for drivers. 'Do they get paid for waiting time, for loading and unloading? That's a big issue for fatigue. I've spoken to drivers who say they start at 6pm and then they wait for sometimes up to four hours for their trucks to be loaded, which means that when they start driving, they're already not fresh when setting out to drive all night.'

'A lot of the industry is still being paid on a piecemeal basis, and that can be per kilometre or per truckload. This encourages drivers to work longer hours and do more shifts. When drivers get paid a regular wage per hour, day or week, they are less encouraged to work excessive hours,' says Mooren.


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