

# Risk *topics*

## Fleet Motivation & Incentives

### **Background**

We have often heard the phrase, "Safety is its own reward." The benefits of an effective fleet safety program are well known. However, even within a comprehensive fleet safety program, breakdowns can occur. Safety can take a back seat due to distractions, boredom, or on the job stress. The establishment of rules and regulations alone will not always ensure that drivers will use safe work habits. An incentive program can be used as an additional tool to enhance fleet safety efforts.

### **Definitions**

Motivation and incentive are closely related, though not identical, terms. Motivation is the subjective force that powers one's drive to attain a goal. The incentive is the "reward" one is motivated toward.

### **Establishing An Incentive Program**

The following are some items to consider when establishing an incentive program.

**Survey Needs:** An evaluation of employees' needs should take place to see if starting an incentive or safety award program would be advantageous. The evaluation should determine driver attitudes about an incentive program and

establish what items would serve as "motivators." The evaluation should also include items like:

- How should incentives be given?
- Who should receive an incentive?
- How often should an incentive be given?
- How should the incentive be publicized?
- Should all employees, including managers/supervisors, participate?
- What activities (safety suggestions or driving record) should be used in the incentive program?

**Management Support** This is critical to the credibility and success of an incentive program. Drivers will respond more positively when they see management assume an active role in ensuring their safety. Management should establish realistic goals, but not reduce the program's benefit by making them too easy. It is also important to establish goals with clear measures to avoid disputes when awarding incentives.

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**Program Structure:** Review your accident history to determine a frequency or incident rate. The review should go far enough back to provide an accurate reflection of company performance. A frequency rate can be used to avoid the artificial impact an increase or decrease in operations might have on the number of occurrences. Severity rates can also be used, but they are difficult to measure accurately. DOT and OSHA use formulas to establish incident rates. If losses are not an issue, then the measure can be adjusted to reward safe work or driving practices. When establishing the program, be careful not to set it up in a way that encourages drivers to avoid reporting incidents. The time period for measuring performance also needs to be established.

You should include a member of your personnel department in the planning process. This person can provide information on laws, tax consequences, and other employee relations issues.

**Attitude** A positive attitude is needed to initiate and maintain an incentive program. Reactions from drivers and supervisors with a focus on potential flaws versus program benefits can be mixed. One way to avoid this problem is to involve a variety of people in the planning process. Persons on the incentive program development team could include drivers, supervisors, maintenance, dispatching, senior management, and anyone else who is included in the incentive program. Having various operations involved in the planning process increases employee participation and improves overall staff acceptance of the plan.

**Awards** Awards offered must be worth the effort in order to be effective. Longer or multiple time periods warrant larger awards. Awards can include certificates, pins, jackets, catalog gifts, din-

ners, and money. Companies exist that provide and support incentive award programs. Care should be used when money is part of the incentive program. The reward amount may need to be increased substantially over time to remain an effective incentive. Also, once spent, little "evidence" remains of the driver's safety success. Awards can be offered on an individual, team, department, or company-wide basis or in some type of combination. Be careful to avoid situations where one driver can be "identified" by his/her peers as the reason an incentive was not awarded.

**Publicity:** Publicize the incentive program at its inception and on a regular basis. A "kick-off" party or other type of event can draw attention to the program and its goals. The size of the affair should be based on the workforce and budget. Use the "kick-off" to present the program rules to each employee and to remind them that the ultimate goal is safety, not just winning a prize. Ongoing publicity can include: bulletin boards, posters, envelope stuffers, and newsletters. The goal of the publicity effort is to get as many drivers as possible interested and involved in the incentive program.

### **Recognition**

Recognition can have a great deal of value and positive impact on drivers. As the saying goes, "a pat on the back feels pretty good." Positive reinforcement is preferred because it avoids some of the pitfalls like fear or resentment that negative reinforcement can create. In addition to publicizing the incentive program itself, information on award winners needs to be highlighted. Recognition can occur at meetings, in company communications, or through highlights in local newspapers. Certificates, pins, or jackets also provide recognition for drivers who earn incentive awards. Some companies have

achieved success by involving the family of workers in the recognition process as beneficiaries or participants at functions. The goal of these types of programs is to include the driver and his/her family in the safety effort.

### Benefits

A well structured and implemented incentive program benefits both the employees and company. Reports have indicated up to 300-400 percent returns on the investment of knowledge and motivation incentives. A reduction in accident frequency and severity provides an economic benefit to the company. In addition, incentive programs can increase employee morale both on and off the job.

### Summary

A safety incentive/motivation program is not a panacea for an ineffective safety effort. An incentive program is effective when used to enhance safety efforts that are already in place. Companies have reported substantial improvements in reaching safety goals with an incentive program. Reinvesting a portion of the "safety" savings into the program is a cost effective method to keep the program "fresh" and ongoing.

### References

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