



# **A Safety Mindset: Why It Should be A Priority for Transportation Companies**

A White Paper from InfoStream

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## INTRODUCTION

Weaving a culture of safety into every organization means embracing the value that a safety mindset offers.

It's a solid value to live by for all company members, both at work and home. All employees should view safety as a core principle in their lives and operating within a successful organization.

Some may ask why view safety as a value vs. a priority? The answer is simple. Priorities change, sometimes daily, whereas a value remains constant.

In this white paper, we'll explore historical trends, current processes, best practices, and the use of technology to support a safety-based culture. These topics will help answer the question, "How do we accomplish our safety mission?"

**NHTSA reported 38,360 people died as a result of a motor vehicle crash in the U.S. roadways in 2020.**

# TRENDS

## Understanding the Numbers

In June of 2021, an NHTSA press release announced: While Americans drove less in 2020 due to the pandemic, NHTSA's early estimates show that an estimated 38,680 people died in motor vehicle traffic crashes—the largest projected number of fatalities since 2007.

Nearly all categories showed an increase in fatalities, such as a 15% increase on urban interstate roadways and speeding-related crashes up 11%. However, with deaths in crashes involving large trucks (commercial or non-commercial use), the NHTSA projects a 2% decline. This statistic is a similar decline as reported in 2017 and 2018.

While this is a positive trend for the trucking industry, if we examine the raw numbers, those percentiles turn into real individuals with families impacted by these crashes — which becomes quite sobering.

Putting it into perspective, over 38 thousand people died due to a motor vehicle crash on U.S. roadways in 2020. This number equates to the population of Shakopee, Minnesota.

## The Facts Alone Don't Tell the Story

Statistics alone don't always tell the entire story. Demographic trends, cultural changes, and lifestyle changes may be impacting the numbers, which on the surface may look different than they are.

For example, one may see that in the past ten years, there has been an uptick in traffic fatalities among people over 65 years of age. Some speculate it's because their reaction time may have slowed, and perhaps they're paying less attention because of their age, etc.

However, there's no truth behind those numbers, even though there are many older drivers on the road. After all, people are living longer. In the third quarter of 2020, about 28.6 million Baby Boomers – those born between 1946-64 – reported they retired. This number is 3.2 million more than in the same 2019 quarter.

Yet, according to the 2020 NHTSA report, fatalities among older persons (65+ years of age) are projected to decline by about nine percent.



## 2020 NHTSA Highway Fatality Fast Facts:

- Pedestrian fatalities were mostly unchanged from 2019 to 2020.
- Fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) increased 1.11%.
- NHTSA's analysis shows that the primary behaviors that drove the increase include: impaired driving, speeding, and failure to wear a seat belt.
- Fatalities decreased in most months involving large trucks greater than 10,000 GVWR (excluding buses and motor homes and including commercial and non-commercial vehicles).
  - 74% of all fatal passenger vehicle cases include large trucks.
  - Tire defects account for around 30% (the most common cause) of all truck-related accidents.

Do numbers show younger drivers as safer on the road? From 1975 to 2019, the rate of passenger vehicle drivers involved in fatal crashes per 100,000 people declined by 66 percent for teenagers ages 16-19.5. Researchers conclude that graduated learners and licensing laws with strong nighttime and passenger numbers restrictions are associated with lower teenage crash rates.

These data and demographic scenarios support the importance of having systems and processes in place that allow you to capture and document as many data points as possible. When you evaluate the safety statistics and trends within your organization, there needs to be more analysis than basing decisions on the face value of statistics. The more information you can analyze, the more insight you can gain and provide ways to prevent at-risk behavior and reduce the potential for unforeseen safety events.

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# PREVENTION

## How do the Advances in Safety Technology Impact the Numbers?

It doesn't seem that long ago when companies dreamed of advanced safety technologies for their fleets. Today, the expectation is this technology is now standard. It serves as the pinnacle for engineering development, so much so that companies like Volvo have deemed safety a centerpiece of their corporate value: "No one should be killed or seriously injured in a new Volvo."

Companies invest in advanced safety technology because it's easier to reduce risk by engineering solutions vs. changing drivers' behavior. Lane departure warnings, collision avoidance systems, telematics such as recording rapid acceleration, hard braking, and GPS tracking are among the most widely used.

The newest devices are safety event recorders, more commonly known as in-cab cameras. With advanced safety technologies, the industry consensus is that the average North American fleet experiences a 20 percent annual accident rate.

A leading factor is commercial fleets needing time to catch up with new technology. Consumers replace personal automobiles with added safety features more often than trucking companies replace trucks. Therefore, as trucking industry professionals, we must continue to focus on changing at-risk behavior.



## Minimizing At-Risk Behavior Starts When the Driver Applies for Employment

There is virtually no fleet today that wouldn't hire or activate a quality driver. Driver shortages propel aggressive recruiting campaigns, and it's tempting for companies to compromise their core values to fill seats that can directly affect revenue.

It's important to remember that an unsafe driver will eventually cost the company more than the potential revenue the driver may earn. Still, that doesn't solve the problem that good drivers are hard to find, and the number of elite drivers is diminishing.

Efforts are underway to increase the available pool of drivers, including promoting individuals with military experience and looking at the feasibility of allowing younger drivers to obtain a CDL with certain restrictions.

Opinions differ on younger drivers. If you are self-insured, it may be a viable option. However, unless insurance carriers agree to reduce the minimum age of the drivers, they are willing to insure, a large portion of the industry cannot hire a younger workforce.

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## Coaching Toward Success

What's the solution? The thought process today is "coach your drivers toward success."

Many organizations adopt a recruiting strategy to identify able drivers and use training to make them suitable and potentially great employees.

Once the driver meets driving fundamentals, shows a desire to succeed, and demonstrates core qualifications, carriers view this training and coaching as an investment toward safety, success, and retention. For this to be an effective strategy, your recruiters and safety personnel must identify those drivers who meet those criteria, qualify them quickly, then onboard them so the coaching can begin immediately.

It is essential to recognize that how you process those drivers and manage their regulatory documents can impact the quality of your driver pool. Examining those documents is critical to weed out drivers who have a high tolerance for taking risks.

The reality is, you still must pay close attention to the drivers allowed to operate under your authority, and the processes

and systems you put in place to support this mission are critical to your success.

Integral to the process to meet DOT and FMCSA requirements, companies typically run CDLIS and MVR reports. Some run pre-employment screening programs (PSPs), check for criminal histories and check sex offender registries.

Best practices include researching Safety Performance History Requests (SPHRs) and verifying previous employment. Managers must pay close attention to the information gathered as the data may lead to additional background checks.

Taking a closer look at the individual's previous work history can assist you in protecting your fleet from unnecessary exposure. Some insightful questions to ask yourself as you review a driver's background should include: Did previous jobs involve high-risk-type occupations? What are the individual's hobbies and outside interests?

These types of questions can provide you with better insight as to how the driver perceives risk-taking. For example, suppose the individual has a hobby of racing boats, riding motocross, or mountain climbing. In that case, they may have a higher risk tolerance, leading to risky driving behaviors.

Consider that as you review the backgrounds of these drivers, you don't necessarily look for reasons to disqualify them, but try to identify areas where your management can provide awareness training and coach these drivers with potential risk factors to reduce risks.



Accountability, visibility, and process management tools that analyze and automate information provided through drivers' employment applications and background reports can give you an advantage in identifying at-risk behaviors along with determining where they may best fit within your organization. Relying solely on manual processes, personal reviews, and no accountability leaves you vulnerable to subjective decision-making and inconsistent hiring practices.

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## EVENTS

### Ready, Set, Respond

Every transportation company strives toward zero crashes. Numerous conversations are occurring today on the topic of motor vehicles safety issues such as autonomous vehicles, infrastructure investments, distracted driving, and alcohol and drug-impaired driving. A report by the National Safety Council documented a strategy to achieve zero deaths by 2050 due to motor vehicle crashes.



Crashes are events that may impact the entire organization in some capacity. As such, depending on the severity of the accident, all hands must be on deck.

The responsibility of adequately navigating through the conditions surrounding a crash can impact the outcome. All parties should be aware of their duties from operations to vehicle maintenance crashes occur.

This reporting begins with the driver and should be part of their training during onboarding. There must be systems in place to support the communication and visibility of the event throughout the organization. These systems mitigate the risk to the company by assuring everyone takes the appropriate steps.



**13.8% of total fatal crashes in the U.S. in 2018 involved at least one large truck or bus.**

### **The Call Comes In**

Be prepared and have a plan for the call. Develop a policy that includes a process for crashes that happen during regular business hours and after hours. Trucking is a 24/7 job, and timely accident notification must occur regardless of the time of day or night.

Be sure to have a direct accident call-in line so the driver can speak with the appropriate personnel. Crashes trigger time-sensitive events, such as FMCSA Post-Accident drug and alcohol testing. It becomes critical to get the accident information documented as accurately and quickly as possible.

## **Make It Personal, Because It Is**

When the initial call comes in, the staff answering the call needs to remember they are talking to fellow humans on the phone who are seeking help and have just experienced a stressful and potentially traumatic event. They may be in shock, confused, disorientated, and worried about the other individuals involved.

It is not unusual for drivers to revert to their native language in a time of crisis. They need to know that someone on the other end is listening, attentive and sensitive to their state of mind. It is important to calm them down to gather the information necessary to begin crash management.

Experience tells us that the severity of the crash will affect the way drivers report the collision. The person taking the call should be familiar with the drivers' accident report training and company documentation policies.

## **Driver's Accident Checklist**

Immediately stop the vehicle in a safe place if the situation allows.

Immediately activate emergency flashers. If it's possible to move the truck, pull off the road or as far to the side as possible to prevent further collisions.

If you're injured, remain in the truck (unless it's necessary to evacuate for safety reasons) and wait for emergency medical assistance to arrive. Movement could cause further injury.

If you're uninjured, check the accident scene to assist others who might be injured. Notify authorities by calling 911.

Take steps to prevent further collisions and injuries if practical and the surrounding terrain allows. Uninjured drivers may set out reflective triangles or warning flares.

It may be necessary to deal with an emergency such as a fire or hazardous material spill in some cases. When safe, check the vehicle to identify possible safety hazards.

Do not speak with anyone at the crash scene except for law enforcement and emergency personnel.



**FMCSA reported the estimated cost of fatal large truck and bus crashes in 2016 was \$53 billion.**

## **POST EVENT: THE AFTERMATH**

### **Respond, Cooperate, and Document**

Once the accident occurs, how your company responds is critical. Up to this point, we've discussed how to mitigate the risk and how to manage the event. Managing the aftermath of a crash impacts your safety policy and potentially the relationship with your drivers, customers, exposure, and brand. The plan is essential but executing on that plan is what defines the consequences.

Let's look at three critical factors that may enter the equation when managing a crash. Of course, each accident will have its own set of circumstances. But at some point, your company will work with law enforcement, insurance companies, and litigators. Being prepared and organized will help you navigate through these scenarios.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Cooperation with law enforcement is highly encouraged. If the crash is severe, authorities will most conduct a post-crash inspection. This review is like a roadside inspection. Keep the after-crash information in a separate file. Accident reports are available from either a reporting agency or a fee-based service that manages crash report requests. The company must document the inspection type correctly to take the appropriate action.

Systems that provide automated response workflows can ensure your organization is taking the required steps based on the post-crash inspection report and makes available documentation and audit logs to parties needing visibility. Maintaining this level of accountability could potentially mitigate your risk.

# INSURANCE

Depending on the severity of the crash and type of insurance coverage, insurance providers often request immediate crash reporting. Most insurance carriers have a dedicated claims department to service their motor carrier customers and often assign a claims adjuster to visit the crash scene. It may be necessary to involve legal counsel to protect the company if the crash is severe.

With much data to gather after the crash, it's vital to have robust systems to collect and disseminate information to the appropriate parties. The sooner you notify your insurance provider, the quicker your claim is processed.

Two-way communication is ideal for both the insurance provider and the carrier. Being able to send and receive information electronically between both companies will streamline the claim processing by eliminating the redundant data entry into both systems and improving the accuracy of the information transferred between systems.

# LITIGATION

Litigation is rampant when a commercial vehicle is involved in a crash. An internet search, "How to File Suit Against a Trucking Company," yields about 34 million results. The rising trend of "Nuclear Verdicts" (jury awards more than \$10 million) dramatically impacts the insurance and trucking industries. The result of litigation is higher insurance premiums and stricter underwriting criteria.

Until the 2020 pandemic slowed driving activity, trucking insurance carriers lost money on commercial insurance policies. According to a report from Fitch Ratings, the combined ratio (CR) of 101.6% for 2020 was nearly 8% better than the 2019 rate. Analysts anticipate further marginal performance improvement to move the commercial auto CR to approximate break-even levels in 2021.



This data shows that for every \$100 collected in policy premiums, U.S. insurers pay out \$101.60. Due to this ongoing revenue loss, some insurance carriers have chosen to exit the commercial auto insurance market.

Reversing these trends will continue to be a difficult task. Motor carriers must use the tools available to them to help reduce crash frequency and severity. Telematics, GPS, ELDs, and in-cab cameras are excellent resources for tracking drivers' performance and identifying at-risk behavior.

With all these technologies comes massive amounts of data. Companies must have a policy before using these tools, including retention plans for the data derived from these devices. While the FMCSA has regulatory statutes for retaining a driver's Record of Duty status, there are no regulatory requirements for keeping other data types.

Companies should consider all facets of the organization and consult with their legal counsel when developing these policies. Having the stability to interpret and react to this data is how carriers derive value from this technology

The systems monitoring, responding, and documenting the events benefit both the carrier and their drivers. Companies who strive to identify at-risk behavior should use this information to coach, educate, and, if necessary, remove the driver. Taking these actions better positions them to maintain a safer fleet and reduce their exposure when an accident occurs.

For example, a company that identifies a driver who has a trend of excessive hard braking incidents (through the monitoring of telematics data) can automatically assign a training event to that driver, potentially set up a coaching session, or, depending on the frequency, send a warning notice.



# SAFETY AT THE CORNERSTONE OF YOUR VALUES

We've discussed many of the trends, considerations, challenges, and potential outcomes transportation providers face daily to maintain a safe fleet. No one policy or plan works the same for every company. However, the single common denominator for those fleets held in high esteem is the safety value woven throughout the company culture. From executive leadership down to the driver on the road, all employees must live and work in the safety mindset. Communicating the safety value in company meetings, training events, and corporate messaging— with accountability at every level — should be a policy that all employees can embrace.



## **InfoStream: Comprehensive Solutions to Ensure Driver Safety and Compliance**

InfoStream, manages the entire driver lifecycle, from qualification to post hire with a variety of robust safety and compliance, driver performance, and risk management solutions, plus managed services.

Our staff of industry professionals provide ongoing support, freeing carriers to focus on what's important – improving at-risk behaviors, reducing company liability, and keeping drivers safe.

As an EBE Technologies company, InfoStream uses its mobile capture application so you can easily track driver compliance to FMCSA regulations and company policies. By aggregating data from a variety of sources, InfoStream's solutions provide multiple views of real-time driver behavior in one, configurable dashboard.