

Risk *topics*

Driver Selection – General Fleet

Background

When employees are hired, whether driving will be their primary or secondary job responsibility, they already come with some degree of driving experience . . . good or bad. Driving is a personal experience influenced by a variety of factors. Only one person can be behind the wheel at any given time, and that individual must have the skills and training to react properly in many situations, i.e.,

- City, suburban, or rural driving
- Different vehicle types
- Heavy or light traffic patterns
- Highway driving
- Distractions
- Changing weather conditions

Because people do have such different driving habits and abilities, employers are challenged with the very difficult and important task of selecting good drivers.

Effective fleet management begins with good drivers. The quality of job performance affects the success of the entire fleet operation and directly influ-

ences fleet safety performance. Every effort must be made to select the most qualified person for the job. The suggestions outlined in this Risk Topic are directed towards selecting drivers. Both occasional and full-time drivers should be selected in the same manner.

Establish Driver Qualifications

Management's first step in selecting drivers is to establish a meaningful and realistic driver qualification program. Well defined job standards should be based on objective criteria and reflect the necessary prerequisites and skills for satisfactory job performance. Include at least the following:

Job Description and Duties: Fully describe the specific nature of the position in order to recognize the best applicant. Determine exactly what the employee must do and how it must be accomplished. Include both driving and non-driving aspects of the job. Apply these standards equally for all job candidates to assure fair hiring practices.

Physical and Mental Qualifications:

Once the nature of the position is established, describe the minimum physical and mental attributes required to perform the job, i.e., vision, hearing, health history, and substance abuse. When establishing these qualifications, determine

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if the driver is subject to the Federal or State Motor Carrier Safety Regulations; apply any minimum qualifications where required.

Background Requirements: Describe the experience prerequisites the applicant should possess for the job, such as level of education, amount of past training, previous driving experience, and degree of driving skill. The applicant's past driving record might also be included in these requirements

General Abilities and Aptitudes: To round out the driver qualifications, some less specific requirements might also be included. A “good driver profile” described by the National Safety Council includes the driver's ability to:

- Avoid accidents
- Follow traffic regulations
- Care for the vehicle
- Meet schedules
- Get along with others
- Adapt to existing conditions

Although these may seem basic, they can be an important factor in successfully hiring good qualified drivers.

Driver Selection Procedures

Drivers who meet well established criteria will usually have the desired qualifications not only to perform their jobs but to do so safely. A variety of informational resources and techniques is available to assist management in the driver selection process.

Recruiting: Attracting well-qualified applicants to apply for a position is the first step in the selection process. Ad-

vertisements should target qualified applicants only. Minimum requirements for the position should be highlighted in the ad to help streamline the selection process. Applicants can be selected from a wide variety of sources, including upgrading present employees, referrals from present employees, industry contacts, walk-ins, advertisements, trade associations, or driver training schools.

Application Form: The employment application is the first source of information about prospective employees. It is a valuable tool for narrowing down the field of applicants to those best qualified for the position. The form should contain only questions pertaining to the applicant's ability to perform the job. Essential information should include personal data, i.e., name, address, telephone number, previous employers, past position descriptions, period of employment, salary, and immediate supervisors. Application forms can be internal company forms or can be obtained from regulatory agencies such as the Department of Transportation or from general office supply stores. Regardless of where the form is obtained, it is important that it be administered according to fair hiring laws.

Interviewing: Hold interviews in a relaxed atmosphere. Remember that the interview is a “conversation with a purpose” designed to obtain more information about the applicant. Verify or expand on information in the application form by encouraging applicants to talk about past employment, training, and other qualifications. Check the applicant's driver's license for expiration date, identification number, and vehicle classification. This process helps the interviewer form an opinion about the applicant's employment attitude, work ethics, driving ability, and safety attitude. In addition, the applicant should gain a

clear understanding of what the job involves and what the company can offer.

Reference Checks: Check references to verify information given on the application and during the interview. Past performance isn't necessarily a sure indicator of future behavior, but it is one of the better resources available. One negative reference report shouldn't be the single deciding factor in not hiring an employee. However, if a trend emerges that indicates questionable behavior, further investigation is warranted.

Request information pertinent to the applicant's past employment to help determine suitability for the job. For example, employment dates, type of work, equipment operated, accidents, traffic violations, and disciplinary problems should be verified.

The two most practical ways to conduct past employment reference checks is in writing or by telephone. Written reference checks are valuable as a permanent record and should be kept with the prospective employee's application and interview notes. Telephone reference checks are faster and often produce more candid information. A checklist will help ensure getting all the information needed and provides a simple written record for the files. The application form should request the applicant's signature to authorize the checking of work references and motor vehicle records.

Due to the strictness of today's fair hiring laws, many past employers are reluctant to divulge more than past employment verification information, i.e., dates of employment and salary. Therefore, although the reference check is a valuable resource, it cannot be relied upon as the only tool in the selection process.

Motor Vehicle Record Checks: An important reference to check is the accident and conviction record kept by state motor vehicle authorities. Drivers with a history of accidents and moving traffic violations are likely to repeat that pattern. This review can give insight into the applicant's attitude toward traffic rules and regulations.

The procedures for obtaining these records vary from state to state, as does the accuracy of the information. Be sure to check the records in other states where the applicant has driven regularly, as well. Don't delay these inquiries. MVR information should be obtained prior to an employee's operating a vehicle for company benefit. Services are available that can promptly obtain this information electronically for a fee. Be sure to obtain a release for this information from the applicant.

Physical Examinations: A physical examination is a legal requirement for drivers subject to DOT oversight and is a good business practice for any fleet operation. Properly administered, the examination provides reasonable assurance that the applicant is physically capable of performing the job. You should consult with your Human Resources Department regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act and the physical exam process.

The examination should be performed by a physician experienced with DOT guidelines (if applicable) or occupation. Discuss the purpose of the exam. Select a physician who is willing to learn and understand your company's needs. A hospital, medical, or trucking association may be able to offer suggestions for selecting a physician.

Written Tests: Written tests on traffic regulations and general driving knowledge can be a valuable tool in driver se-

lection. Although above average test results don't guarantee the applicant will be a good driver, they can certainly indicate a level of driver knowledge. For the applicant with no experience, these tests can be a good predictor of future performance. Tests must be geared to the actual job requirements. Be particularly conscious of the equal employment laws governing testing.

Road Tests: It is a good practice to administer road and skill tests to any potential employee who will drive, even if they are to drive only occasionally. Conduct the test in a vehicle similar to the one the applicant will drive (or one with which he or she is familiar). Have the individual perform a few maneuvers in the parking lot before going on the road. Once on the road, follow a route similar to the one the applicant will drive if hired. Use a standard scoring system to rate the driver.

In addition to testing driving skills, observe the applicant's attitude toward other vehicles. Also, check to see if he or she automatically puts on the seat belt without a reminder. Remember, the applicant is most likely nervous and will probably drive with extra caution. However, these tests can give a good indication of the person's driving capabilities.

Probationary period: A probationary period should be a condition of employment that is so stated on the application form. The time frame should be long enough to obtain reports from the motor vehicle authorities on traffic accident and conviction records. It must also permit enough time to conduct a detailed observation and appraisal of the employee's performance as compared with the job standards. A minimum of 30 days probation should be used unless labor agreements call for more or less time.

Caution

Employee selection procedures, from the application to the reference check, are governed by federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination in employment. It is possible to discriminate unknowingly if you are not fully aware of the requirements of these laws. Obtain guidance from your personnel department in all hiring activities.

References

1. Alliance of American Insureds, 1501 Woodfield Road, Suite 400 West, Schaumburg, IL 60173.
2. American Insurance Services Group, Inc., Engineering & Safety Services Division, 85 John Street, New York, NY 10038.
3. American Trucking Associations, Inc., Safety and Security Department, 1616 P Street NW, Washington, DC 20036.
4. American Transit Association, 815 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20006.
5. National Safety Council, 444 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611.
6. National Committee For Motor Fleet Supervisor Training, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802.

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