

Bringing you important news for business drivers - May 2010

INDUSTRY PUTS DUTY OF CARE FIRST

According to a survey by a well known fleet management organisation, risk management and duty of care issues are now more important to their customers than pure cost management.

In fact 75% of respondents cited risk management as their top priority for 2010 and, although 63% claimed to have some risk management solutions in place, 25% admitted to having no provision at all.

It seems that the hot topic of mobile phone use (see story below) is high on the agenda though, with 89% of those polled confirming that they had specific controls in place.

Whilst we welcome this apparent focus on driver risk management we would obviously point out, as we have done on many occasions in the past, that a risk management programme tailored to the needs of the customer should always yield financial savings, as well as help in achieving duty of care compliance.

HANDS FREE BAN?



We reported in the last edition of the newsletter on the latest research about the detrimental effect on reaction times when making or taking a call whilst driving using a hands free kit and understandably the debate rumbles on in the media because using a mobile phone in this way is of course entirely legal.

But as Dr Graham Hole, a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Sussex, points out, we have far more to worry about than the effects of a mere phone conversation: "With the advent of the latest generation of smartphones, computing has finally become truly mobile – the obvious temptation is to use these devices while driving".

Whilst various road safety experts are pushing for an outright ban on the use of any form of mobile whilst driving, the DfT has confirmed there are no such plans in place, nor are there likely to be given the change of government and minister. Various organisations - AA DriveTech included - have already banned their staff from using phones, even with legal hands free kits, whilst driving, and global brand 3M is the latest to adopt this stance.

We do recognise however that for various reasons a total ban in your own organisation may not be possible, even if it is desirable. If this is the case we would insist on, at the very least, responsible use of mobile phones, particularly smartphones. Phones should be switched off whilst the employee is driving. If communication with a driving colleague is absolutely essential leave a voicemail, asking them to call you back when they have stopped in a safe place. Additionally, we would strongly suggest incorporating the following wording for driving employees' voicemail messages:

'I can't answer your call at the moment as I may be driving. If you leave a message I will call you back when I've found a safe place to do so.'

When it comes to employees texting and emailing whilst driving, this has to be specifically referred to in your organisation's driving for work policy document as being unacceptable, in the same way a hand held mobile would be. Incidentally, it's a good idea to remind employees that it's illegal to answer a phone call with a hand held mobile if the engine is still running, even if you are parked up in a safe place.

If any reader needs to create or update their occupational driver-related policies we can help by providing easy to adapt templates - contact Tracey Bass on 01256 495732 or via tracey.bass@AADrivetech.com

DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?

Further to our story back in January's edition of the newsletter, about the number of illegal employee driving licences that we are routinely uncovering on behalf of clients, it appears that our investigations pale into insignificance compared to the story that surfaced in the fleet media a couple of weeks ago.

It transpires that an employee had been driving without a legal licence for some 16 years without his employer realising and his secret was only revealed by a proper licence check through the DVLA.

AA DriveTech is one of only a handful of suppliers able offer the new generation of driver licence checking service from the DVLA, known as 'e-DECS'. Any reader wishing to know more about this facility should contact the Head of Corporate Risk Services, Alison Crump, on 01256 495755 or via alison.crump@AADrivetech.com

BLACK, ROUND AND VITAL



Most drivers consider them black, round and boring but tyres are not only an essential safety feature but can waste money too. The four tyre 'contact patches', each about the size of a size 10 shoe sole, are all that is separating you from the tarmac. Underinflation not only causes those contact patches to distort and lose grip but it can also increase fuel consumption – it's estimated that £0.7 billion a year is being wasted annually in this way.

The UK tyre safety organisation TyreSafe says that one of its members checked 4,500 cars over a three month period and 36% were found to have severely uninflated tyres. This is not only unsafe and wasteful but it's actually as illegal as having tyre tread below the legal minimum of 1.6mm – the penalty can be as much as £1000 per tyre.

NOT A GREY AREA

We have pointed out on several occasions in the past that employers have the same duty of care and risk management obligations towards staff that use their own cars for work – the so-called 'grey fleet' – as they do towards those driving company-provided vehicles.

Latest industry figures confirm that there is huge reliance placed on this largely unmanaged sector of the UK fleet industry but employers seemingly feel that they have no responsibility to influence driver behaviour or monitor vehicle condition.

Worryingly, 24% of grey fleet vehicles cover more than 10,000 miles a year on business-related journeys and the 197 organisations in the latest survey ran a total of 59,000 grey vehicles, or the equivalent of 300 each.

If you are concerned about what steps you need to take to manage your grey fleet, AA DriveTech's FleetSafe team will be pleased to offer advice and guidance. Contact Tracey Bass on 01256 495732 or via tracey.bass@AAdrivetech.com and she will arrange for one of our experts to come out to discuss your needs.

CRASH FOR CASH HOTSPOTS

Back in February we highlighted the problem of staged crashes, where fraudsters induce fake collisions and then make insurance claims, often including those for fictitious injuries. Analysis by Direct Line insurance confirms that the top five hotspots worth avoiding are:



- Centenary Way, Trafford Park, Manchester
- Haslingden roundabout, junction 5, M65
- Scotland Road roundabout, junction 13, M65
- Gannow Top roundabout, Cavalry Way, Burnley
- Eden Point roundabout, A34, Stockport

By way of a reminder, call **0300 123 1212** if you believe that you have been involved in a deliberately induced collision and give the index number of the vehicle you have collided with. **YOU MUST TELL THE OPERATOR THAT YOU NEED AN OPERATION CATCHER RESPONSE.**

REIGNING IN WHITE VAN MAN

One would have thought that an EU proposal to restrict the speed of vans to 75 mph would have been met with grudging acceptance by white van man, especially as so many van operators already artificially limit their vans anyway, but it seems this measure has not gone down well: "Just picked up my restricted Renault Traffic today. As you sit there at 68mph, because there is no control or throttle adjustment needed, it is far easier to lose attention" claims one website visitor, presumably an owner operator that feels unjustly deprived of that extra 2 mph up to the legal limit.

There is no question that lower, restricted speeds cause tedium and potential loss of concentration - I am sure I'm not alone in witnessing truck drivers reading newspapers, texting and even using a laptop whilst on the motorway. Collectively we just have to keep the stream of cautionary advice and guidance going, whether it be directly with employees or via the appropriate media.

...and news from AA DriveTech itself:

AA DriveTech and a2om international have announced a formal partnership between the two companies, focused on delivering innovative and market-leading online risk assessment and e-learning technology to the fleet industry. This initiative is part of a broader strategic relationship between the two companies which also includes the AA Driving School and a number of Driver Awareness Schemes delivered by AA DriveTech on behalf of many UK Police forces.

The partnership has led to a2om's innovative technology and compelling content being embedded into AA DriveTech's growing online fleet risk management portfolio. A2om's products provide fleet managers with the capability to assess their driver's exposure to risk 'online' and then seamlessly provide individually-focused online learning programmes to address the identified areas of risk.

We will have more news over the coming months about how this development will enhance the FleetSafe product line up and position AA DriveTech as the only credible choice of supplier for truly all-encompassing driver risk management solutions.

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