



RISK INSIGHTS

DRIVER DISTRACTIONS IN THE TRANSPORTATION INDUSTRY

Distracted driving drastically increases the risk of getting into an incident. The goal of a driver operating a vehicle and carrying passengers is to deliver their passengers as safely as possible to their destination.

THE FULL FOCUS OF A DRIVER SHOULD BE ON DRIVING.

Unfortunately, busy events such as parties, as well as business requiring assistance from the driver, can increase distractions and cause dangerous road situations. As a professional driver, it requires a great deal of patience and discipline to maintain focus in such a distracting environment. To ensure that customers can have an enjoyable experience without compromising safety, it is important for drivers to manage distracting situations swiftly and safely.

You can reduce risks by managing distracted driving, with the help of these recommendations. In order to make safety your priority, employees should follow the guidelines and policies set by your organization. It is also essential that the driver and passengers do not break laws, such as having no tolerance for alcohol consumption in the vehicle.

We recommend

Education

Educate drivers on the increasing trend of incidents caused by distracted driving and how it can endanger their lives, as well as the lives of passengers. Statistics don't lie; even being distracted for a couple of seconds greatly increases the risk of an incident occurring.

Training Programs

Provide a collision prevention training program incorporating scenarios of passenger distractions that may occur on the job.

Training can include:

- How to identify potentially unruly passengers
- Procedures to manage distracting passengers
- How to enforce the rules of the vehicle assertively and professionally

Passenger Policies

Thoroughly define what the consequences are for not following rules to ensure that passengers acknowledge them when signing the service contract.

The driver can further inform passengers of the rules prior to boarding, and remind them that they are responsible for their actions, which could pose a risk to their own safety.

The driver may want to give a warning to passengers that are starting to become uncontrollable. Drivers are to follow up with the consequences for broken rules.

In order to make safety your first priority, employees should follow the guidelines and policies set by your organization.

Zero Tolerance for Substance Abuse

Alcohol consumption is common in party buses and limousines. However, belligerent behaviour and unruliness cannot be tolerated. Be strict with the alcohol policy that has been set by the organization, as well as laws pertaining to alcohol consumption. Finally, ensure passengers know there is absolutely no tolerance for smoking or use of illegal drugs inside the vehicle.

Use an Assistant

Use an assistant or chaperon to respond to distractions and manage the behaviour of passengers, if needed. An assistant would be particularly useful when carrying a larger number of passengers, as well as to assist new drivers.

Judgment

The driver's primary responsibility is to safely transport everyone in the vehicle. If there's any disruption that may inhibit that purpose, the driver can always pull over in a safe location until the distraction is settled. If a passenger is becoming aggressive and the driver feels threatened, call the authorities to help settle the dispute.

Dispatch communication with drivers

Communication with the driver, while in transit, is a major issue in the passenger industry. Follow your provincial legislation on not using handheld, electronic devices while driving, as your focus should be on the road rather than viewing display screens.

Examples of handheld devices include, but are not limited to:

- Mobile phones
- Tablets
- Laptops

As part of your training and internal policies, inform drivers that they are not to use a handheld device with or without passengers in the vehicle. A simple policy statement can be included in their driver package and stored as part of the driver's file.

In some cases, dispatch or fleet managers may need to get in touch with a driver immediately. The challenge is to ensure that the driver is not breaking the law and placing passengers in danger. All communication needs to be safe while still meeting business needs.

You can avoid this communication dilemma with some careful preparation:

Frequent check-in times (where possible)

It is suggested that the driver and dispatch are communicating regularly for any updates or changes. Check-in times can vary depending on the driver's drop-off and pick-up schedule. While this may not always be an option for limousine drivers, a policy could be established requiring drivers to check-in upon arrival at a destination, as well as after drop-off. This provides some opportunity for the driver and dispatch to communicate important information.

In the event that dispatch needs to speak to the driver directly (while they are with passengers), a policy could be established where a call is placed to the driver with no voicemail delivered. If dispatch calls back immediately, this should be a notification to the driver that they need to speak as soon as possible. Always be honest with the passenger and let them know that you need to reach dispatch.

Hands-free technology

Bluetooth features in-vehicle or headsets can be an effective way for a driver to communicate with dispatch. Using hands-free technology allows the driver to quickly communicate with dispatch and receive any updated information with minimal disruption to any passengers.

Telematics

Another solution for passenger fleets to explore is the use of telematics or GPS software. Telematics is essentially the means of sending, receiving and storing information relating to vehicles through telecommunications devices.

Some benefits of using telematics include:

- **Real time status** – Drivers can receive current statuses and send back information to dispatch and management. This eliminates the need to speak to the driver over the phone, and reduces distractions on the road.
- **Ease of use** – Communication applications can run on multiple devices from mobile phones to tablets and other tools.
- **Safety** – Instructions can be programmed so that messages are only received when the driver is stopped.
- **Driver management** – Know where your drivers are at all times.
- **Manage assets** – Know where your equipment is at all times.

For more information on making your business safer, contact our Risk Services team at **1.833.692.4111** or visit us at www.northbridgeinsurance.ca.