

## NDIRF ANNOUNCES \$2 MILLION CONFERMENT OF BENEFITS

The conferment of benefits earned by NDIRF members in 2011, to be paid out on April 1, 2012, is nearly \$2 million. This brings the total of conferment payments across the eighteen year span of the program to over \$56 million. A remarkable achievement for the Fund and its membership! The conferment of benefits would have been significantly higher this year, however, if auto related claims had not spiked upward by almost 90% from the prior year. In the spirit of focusing on this situation, we have devoted most of this edition of the Participant to auto loss prevention techniques. ■

### ON THE PATH TO A SAFER FLEET:

#### BEST PRACTICES FOR HIRING AND RETAINING THE SAFEST DRIVERS

##### 10 Best Practices For Driver Selection And Hiring

Whether you hire Commercial Driver's License (CDL) drivers, commercial vehicle drivers or private passenger drivers, a best practices driver selection and hiring process should be part of your comprehensive risk management plan. The 10 areas outlined are designed to put you on a path to operating a safer fleet.

##### 1. Driver's Employment Application

The driver's past driving record is one of the top determinants of future performance. Your employment application should gather as much driving history information as possible, including overall driving experience, types of vehicles driven and, if applicable, what types of material they hauled.

##### 2. Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) Review

The MVR is one of the best tools to use to evaluate an applicant's past driving performance and should be considered fully, no matter what type of vehicle the applicant has driven in the past. Notify the applicant that the MVR will be reviewed and get their signed permission to obtain it. Even though an MVR may not identify all accidents or violations, it almost always indicates general driving performance. When looking at the MVR, avoid using Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) points as the main criterion because points are not assigned uniformly across states. It's more effective to look at the number of violations, number of crashes and the accident record. The employer, not an outside company, should make all MVR decisions. The driver operates under the employer's authority and the employer must decide whether to allow the driver to operate.

##### 3. Employment Interviews

Interviews should be face-to-face. It is easier to conduct an interview over the phone, but there is no replacement for meeting the person you might be putting behind the wheel. The interviewer must be educated in driving regulations and driving job duties and have the ability to resolve questions or issues regarding the information on the application.

The interviewer's job is to determine the applicant's past driving experience and attitude toward safe driving. Giving the interviewee ample time to answer questions is key. Focus on gaps in employment and ask what they were doing during those gaps.

Above all, the most important part of the interview is to review the driver's MVR with the applicant. Ask the applicant to explain all past accidents that may appear on the MVR, their causes and how the accident could have been prevented. The applicant's response will help the interviewer evaluate if the potential employee is committed to safely operating your vehicles.

##### 4. Driver's License Verification

Make it a job requirement that drivers have a valid driver's license for the state in which they reside. Check the

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license to determine if they are qualified and licensed to operate the type of vehicle they will be driving. Then, make a copy of the license for your records.

**5. Reference Check**

All reference checks should be completed over the phone, not via letter or email. This makes it easier to get a response and gather more detailed information about the applicant. When doing the reference check, verify an applicant's information, including their length of employment, their accident record and their job performance, specifically when it comes to operating vehicles. Keep a record of reference checks in the driver's personnel file.

**6. Physical Examination**

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) regulations for CDL and commercial drivers requires a medical examination upon employment and every 24 months thereafter to ensure fitness for duty. This is a good control mechanism and you should consider making it a requirement for all drivers. If possible, use one designated licensed physician for all applicants and make sure that they are aware of the physical and emotional demands of the job. It is not wise to allow the applicant to use their family doctor, since the physician's primary concern may not be your public entity. Consult with your legal counsel as well to ensure that you comply with ADA regulations.

**7. Substances (Drug) Test**

The FMCSA requires a substances (drug) test of applicants before employment as a CDL driver. FMCSA also requires random drug testing, testing when there is reasonable suspicion and post-accident drug testing. Consult the FMCSA regulation on drug testing, a local drug counselor or agency for guidance on substances to be included.

Even if there is no federal regulation for your class of drivers, you should do substance testing on a pre-emptive basis. Random and post-accident testing can provide valuable data in the case of a lawsuit.

**8. Road Test**

A road test is one of the best ways to determine if an applicant can perform the tasks required for the job. Road tests should be conducted in the same type of vehicle that the applicant will be driving and on a pre-determined course. Depending on the type of fleet you operate, some aspects of the test may include backing up, changing lanes, hills, city and/or highway driving and vehicle inspection. When the same course is used consistently, you can better evaluate if each applicant can perform required tasks. Always use a formal evaluation sheet for the test and keep a copy in the personnel file.

**9. Written Test**

In addition to a road test, consider using a written test to assess general knowledge and evaluate if an applicant knows and understands the rules of the road. If used, care must be taken to ensure the tests are not discriminatory and are clearly associated with the knowledge and skills necessary for the position.

**10. Background Check**

A background check is most crucial for screening applicants who may be transporting passengers, cash, high-value goods and/or security-sensitive goods. It is critical to ensure these items are in safe hands. Before beginning the process, be certain to receive the applicant's written authorization to do a background check.

**Driver Training, Coaching and Motivation**

Once you have hired safe drivers, what can you do to keep them driving properly and safely? The best partner to the 10 best practices for driver selection and hiring is a comprehensive driver coaching, training and motivation program.

Even drivers with impeccable records need feedback and coaching. To start, ensure that drivers know and understand your fleet and the regulations you are required to follow. For example, CDL and commercial vehicle drivers must adhere to the FMCSA regulations.

Beyond regulations, there are many types of coaching programs for drivers. In-class and in-vehicle driver training programs highlight the knowledge and skills necessary for a driver to perform the job. Orientation coaching helps introduce new drivers to your public entity and establish the basis of the fleet safety program. Refresher coaching

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updates drivers on changes in relation to driving routes, cargo, equipment, regulations and policies. Finally, remedial coaching addresses performance issues.

Driver training and coaching varies with the job's complexity. At a minimum, a training and coaching program should include:

- Government regulations (following the FMCSA regulations for CDL and commercial drivers)
- Policies/procedures/rules
- Inspection and maintenance
- Routes and scheduling
- Defensive driving tactics
- Accident investigation

Other ways to approach driver training include “check rides” or observations in which you accompany drivers on the road, mentoring programs in which your most trusted drivers are partnered with new employees and web-based programs that help educate drivers on identifying/addressing the most risky behaviors that can lead to costly crashes.

Tell employees that they serve their community and should always be mindful, as they go about their everyday work, they are highly visible in their community and their actions are noticed. Each employee, in effect, becomes the face of that public entity and they should always act with that knowledge and responsibility.

### **Driver Retention: Overcoming A Monumental Challenge**

Retaining qualified drivers can be quite a challenge and many employers may underestimate the true cost of driver turnover.

The problem of turnover can compound. If you are losing drivers, you may inadvertently start hiring lower-quality drivers and dilute training for existing drivers just to keep vehicles on the road. It can even affect the accident review process and other functions when most supervisor time is spent on hiring. Employee turnover also impacts morale.

In order to develop a remedy, find out why people are leaving. Once you start asking why, you may learn that money is not always the number one reason drivers leave. Often it may have more to do with their supervisor and how they are treated. A Florida State University study reports that 40 percent of the employees in the study said they work for supervisors who failed to keep promises, invaded employee privacy or made negative comments about an employee to others. These types of management indiscretions repel good workers.

In addition, watch for red flags. Are there a large percentage of accidents, injuries and driving complaint calls? This may indicate that your drivers are doing too much, too quickly. Evaluate whether or not your drivers are given enough time to do their jobs. Is the system set up to force them to rush? Do you provide support with directions and route management? It is critical to understand what the driver's experience is really like.

### **Measuring And Sharing Results**

The saying, “What gets measured, gets done” applies to your fleet safety program. To enable you to achieve results, it is important to set goals and measure performance. Carefully select key metrics that you will measure, such as the number of accidents per miles driven or number of accidents per vehicle and evaluate these metrics annually, against your own results from past years. Be sure to share your results with all your partners in your fleet safety program, including human resources and managerial staff.

### **The Good News**

Though vehicle accidents are the leading cause of occupational deaths and can cost your organization both its financial security and reputation, the good news is that you can improve the safety of your fleet and lower your drivers' risk of highway accidents with a comprehensive driver safety program. Implementing best practices in driver hiring, selection, coaching and retention will put your organization on the path to operating a safer fleet.

*Originally published in Public Risk magazine. ■*

**Be an HR ALL STAR  
Get in the Game**

**Mark Your  
CALENDAR**

**May 2012**

- 1: NDLC Regional Meetings, NW Region, New Town**
- 2: NE Region, Minto**
- 3: SE Region, Oakes**
- 8: SC Region, Lincoln**
- 8: NDIRF Annual Meeting Ramkota Inn, Bismarck**
- 8: NDIRF Board of Directors Meeting NDIRF offices, Bismarck**
- 9: NDLC Regional Meetings, NC Region, Garrison**
- 10: SW Region, Beach**

People are the backbone of local government. The management of human resources is a challenge for governments of all sizes. On April 25 - 26, 2012, the second statewide conference entirely focused on Human Resource Management for local governments will be held in Bismarck, North Dakota. This conference will address issues for policy makers, human resource staff, business managers, auditors, and supervisors – anyone who has a responsibility for managing people. This conference welcomes any type of local governments: city government, county government, parks and recreation, schools, public health and townships.

The conference will feature national speaker, native North Dakotan Dale Brown. His presentation **We Are All in This Together** will help us understand the basics of team work. Dale Brown's straightforward, determined approach, combined with his knowledge of the game, excellent recruiting skills and his positive philosophy made his dream a reality. Dale Brown started his coaching career in ND and ended by serving 44 years as the basketball coach at LSU. In addition to Dale Brown's keynote address, two excellent general sessions will also be held. The first will be a panel presentation on **Workplace Violence**. The second will be a session on **Keeping Everything Legal**, which will be presented by Lisa Edison Smith, Attorney with the Vogel Law Firm.

Attendees will also have the opportunity to attend all four breakout sessions offered. They will focus on Transition/Succession Planning, HR Hot Topics (Veteran's Preference, Wage and Hour, HR Audits), Performance Management of Challenging Employees, and Basics of Compensation Planning. The Collaborative is working with SHRM, the ND State Bar Association, Board of Social Work Examiners and the POST Board to provide credits for this event. Let's not forget to include fun! Put on your favorite team jersey for the Tailgate Party Wednesday night! Socialize with your teammates while you enjoy good food, music and trivia by Wild Inspire! Prizes will be awarded to top winners and even for those who didn't make the cut!

Register today at [www.ndaco.org/hrconference](http://www.ndaco.org/hrconference). ■

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