

Driver training and education

QFleet driver safety fact sheet

Safe driving and workplace health and safety belong together.

A driver education and training program should be part of an organisation's workplace health and safety strategy. It should reflect a genuine and ongoing commitment to improving driving safety. Driver education and training should be included in the organisation's planning processes so that the necessary funding and other resources are made available to enable drivers to access timely and appropriate education and training.

The organisation will benefit from driver education and training that encourages drivers to improve their attitudes and behaviour toward safer driving. While the individual has responsibility for applying what is learned, the responsibility to provide education and training opportunities and monitor the results rests with the employer organisation.

Training needs analysis

The first step in determining the most appropriate education and training is to conduct a training needs analysis. It should be a structured process, undertaken by a training or human resourcing professional, with at least a basic understanding of contemporary road safety issues.

A training needs analysis is a systematic investigation involving:

- task analysis (the driving requirement associated with a particular organisation or role)

- understanding of the desired outcome/s within the organisation
- knowledge of the practical skills and behavioural skills to achieve the role or outcome.

The training needs analysis should include:

- collecting and analysing data to identify individual and/or organisational needs (including crash and infringement data)
- analysing work-related driving requirements to determine knowledge and skills required for safe and effective performance
- collecting information to determine the current level of knowledge and skill within the organisation
- analysing the information to identify gaps between the organisation's needs and the current individual skill profile
- seeking advice, recommendations and options to address the gap between the current standard and the desired standard.

Consider this: A driver who passes a driver's licence test once in their lifetime is not necessarily a safe driver for life.

A move away from simulated skills-based driver safety training

Post-licence driver training and education has undergone a change of focus in recent years. The earlier forms of driver training targeted the development of emergency control skills such as skid control and emergency braking. More recent road safety research has found that a driver trained in these emergency control skills is highly unlikely to retain those skills because unless

they are practised and used regularly in everyday driving, they are quickly forgotten.

In addition, vehicle technology innovations such as electronic stability control and anti-lock braking systems have reduced the need for emergency driving skills.

The preferred focus now is to deliver driver education and training which targets an improvement in safe skills and driver attitudes and behaviours. It is more beneficial to educate drivers to drive in a manner which avoids the need to respond to an emergency situation rather than to teach them the skills required to respond once an emergency has occurred.

There is also a link between increased skill and increased risk taking. Recent research suggests that attendance at 'skid pan' training has actually increased post-training crash involvement. Training, with a strong focus on vehicle handling skills, can encourage some drivers, particularly younger drivers, to become over confident or to lead them to practise their newly acquired skills on public roads.

Education to improve driver attitudes and behaviours

Approximately 95 per cent of all road crashes are attributable to unacceptable driver attitudes and inappropriate driver behaviours. Driver education and training should be structured to address these two key issues.

Some typical examples of crash causes linked to driver attitude and behaviour are:

- driver inattention and distraction
- speeding
- driver aggression
- failing to obey the road rules
- following too closely
- driving while influenced by alcohol and/or medication/drugs
- driving while tired.

Evidence of unacceptable attitudes and behaviours by work-related drivers may include:

- frequent infringement notices for speeding and other traffic offences

- an abnormal number of 'at fault' vehicle crashes
- a high incidence of unexplained vehicle damage
- the reluctance or refusal of staff to travel with a particular driver
- non-adherence to safe driving policy and procedures.

For normal work-related driving, the preferred driver education and training should focus on encouraging drivers to examine their own attitudes and behaviours and challenge them to bring about some self-improvement.

The preferred syllabus should:

- ensure that managers and supervisors are trained in their roles and responsibilities as they relate to driver safety
- raise awareness about road safety risks
- increase awareness of the human factors that influence driver safety
- raise awareness of personal attitudes and behaviours that contribute to unsafe driving
- encourage drivers to honestly self-evaluate their abilities, strengths and weaknesses
- encourage drivers to discuss their behaviours and feelings openly
- examine an organisation's road safety culture
- focus on the driver's responsibilities for vehicle maintenance, servicing and safety
- accommodate the varying levels of prior training, and varying ability of the participants.

The time spent with a qualified specialist instructor/training provider can quickly refresh a driver's knowledge and skills and help them to improve their ability to drive safely. It is also an opportunity to identify poor driving habits and correct them before an incident occurs.

Consider this:

- Most drivers agree that driving is potentially dangerous.
- Most drivers believe that they are unlikely to be involved in a crash.
- Most drivers believe that they are not at risk and do not need to change their driving behaviours.
- Nearly all drivers have a distorted opinion about their driving skill and a complacent attitude to their own driving, considering the risk involved.

Who should attend driver education and training?

Anyone who drives a vehicle regularly as part of their daily duties should attend driver education and training. Education and training should also be considered for:

- drivers who may be required to drive long distances or for a long duration
- young and inexperienced drivers
- drivers with frequent work-related (or personal – through self-identification) violations for speeding and other traffic offences
- drivers with a history of at fault work-related vehicle crashes
- all new and recently transferred employees
- managers and supervisors
- drivers of new and unfamiliar vehicles.

The education and training provider

The organisation should ensure that quality education and training is provided by engaging suitably qualified and experienced educators and trainers. It may be beneficial to research and evaluate a number of providers and courses to select the most appropriate. They should also ensure that the education and training:

- is structured to suit the organisation's requirements
- is delivered by a provider who has a long or proven industry reputation
- does not have an over-emphasis on speed, performance or a simulated skills-based driving experience
- is properly evaluated over time to measure the effectiveness of the provider and the participants' information, comprehension and retention
- is regularly reviewed to evaluate its ongoing relevance to the organisation and the effectiveness of the program in improving driver safety
- is delivered in suitable training facilities.

Further education and training

In addition to the driver education and training described above, it is likely that there may still be a requirement for other, more specialised driver education and training to address specific driver safety requirements listed below.

Executive and senior management education

An organisational road safety program needs leadership and support from senior managers to achieve the culture change required to achieve attitudinal change. Active involvement of managers at all levels is therefore essential. The organisation's executive and senior managers should fully understand the road safety program, the risks associated with driving and their obligations.

Induction training

An overview of an organisation's road safety program should be made when discussing the work health and safety component of a staff induction program. This is the first step in establishing a wider organisational culture that supports the attitudes and behaviours associated with responsible road safety. It is a valuable forum as all staff, regardless of position, will be made aware that the organisation recognises road safety as an important issue. The induction process can also:

- identify the inductee's specialised, work-related driver education and training needs
- identify the currency of, classification/s of and any restrictions to the inductee's licence.

Relocation of international employees

Some organisations recruit staff from other countries. Such staff may hold a valid international driver's licence but have little or no driving experience in Australia. Education and training should be provided to assess their abilities, to increase their knowledge of the local road rules and to better prepare them for local driving conditions. A local driving training provider may be able to assist.

Consider this:

An international driver's licence does little more than acknowledge that the holder possesses a valid driving licence in the country of issue. Obtaining an international driver's licence does not require the licence holder to demonstrate any knowledge or skills in relation to driving in other countries.

Vehicle familiarisation

An organisation is not managing its work health and safety responsibilities adequately if drivers are not being educated or trained in the operation of new and unfamiliar vehicles. Some fleet vehicles are updated every two or three years. It is therefore likely that the drivers of those vehicles will be regularly exposed to the requirement to drive vehicles with new and unfamiliar technology such as:

- electronic or foot operated parking brakes
- keyless ignition systems
- auto stop engines
- electric vehicles
- discreet gear change levers
- hybrid drive systems and advanced automatic and semi-automatic transmissions
- indicator controls or headlight controls on either side of the steering column
- automatic headlights and windscreen wipers
- complex seat and/or steering wheel adjustments
- refuelling with the correct fuel e.g. diesel vehicles
- space saver spare wheels and tyre sealant kits.

To ensure that drivers can safely operate new vehicles, familiarisation, education and training must be provided.

Vehicle familiarisation can also be supplemented by a vehicle safety card or vehicle owner's manual (in the glove box) that explains the new and unusual features of the vehicle. Drivers will need to be advised that this is where they look for instructions. If vehicle familiarisation is intended to be limited to directing the driver to read the vehicle owner's manual, then the driver must be provided with the manual, and adequate time to read it thoroughly, prior to being required to operate the vehicle for the first time.

If the vehicle is significantly different from other vehicles the employee has driven before e.g. a 4WD vehicle or electric vehicle, then a comprehensive familiarisation by an experienced supervisor is highly recommended.

Remedial training

An organisation should establish parameters and policies for remedial driver training as part of ongoing risk management activities. There should be a system to identify those drivers in need of further driver education and training and/or remediation. It is not acceptable to ignore the warning signs that a driver needs remedial education and training. The warning signs may include repeated traffic infringements, repeated 'at fault' vehicle crashes or frequent incidents involving risky behaviour. Remedial education and training which is delivered in a timely manner will ensure that an organisation meets its work health and safety obligations and will help to prevent more serious incidents from occurring.

Specialist driver education and training

There is a requirement for specialist driver education and training in some organisations. The education and training usually arises as a result of the requirement for drivers to operate specialist vehicles or to operate vehicles in extreme environments. Examples include:

- vehicles equipped with hoists for transporting disabled persons
- the requirement to operate 4WD vehicles in rural and remote environments
- the requirement to tow large trailers.

One-on-one training

There may be situations where a particular driver would benefit from one-on-one training with a professional driver educator or trainer. The education and training may arise from a need to address attitudinal or motivational issues such as:

- inflated confidence
- lack of confidence including confidence lost through vehicle trauma
- poor perceptual skills, such as hazard perception.

Refresher education and training

An organisation may identify the need for refresher education and training in a specific area of skill as opposed to a more comprehensive driver education and training course. This may result from the need to:

- address inexperience or lack of recent experience
- allow a driver to refresh skills which have not been used often e.g. towing
- allow drivers who have held a licence for a long time to refresh road rules knowledge
- gain more confidence
- drive a vehicle with a manual transmission
- drive off-road
- encourage older drivers to update their skills and knowledge
- assist drivers with a disability.

Eco-driving education and training

Eco-driving can be described as the fuel efficient operation of any vehicle to achieve better fuel economy and to lower tailpipe emissions. This can be achieved through adopting a very smooth and non-aggressive driving style with a reduction in the number of starts and stops.

Eco-driving can provide both environmental and road safety benefits. The drivers who adopt eco-driving techniques will drive in a more fuel efficient manner and also drive in a safer manner. They should achieve fuel savings of between 10 and 15 per cent and also achieve a reduction in driving risk.

Some of the benefits of Eco-driving are:

- reduced greenhouse gas emissions
- reduced emissions that are harmful to human health
- improved management of fuel costs
- reduced vehicle/fleet operating costs
- reduced crash rate/vehicle abuse
- improved driving techniques.

The following are some techniques which should be included in Eco-driving education and training:

- looking ahead and planning ahead
- early hazard identification and controlled braking
- non-aggressive driving e.g. driving with the 'flow' of the traffic
- speed limit compliance
- smoother use of the accelerator and brakes
- controlling engine rpm
- improved gear selection
- the use of cruise control.

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