

By Kara Kurylłowicz

# Crash course

## Fleet managers use training to reduce collisions

THERE'S A SEMANTIC SHIFT GOING ON in the world of fleet management. Instead of "accident," progressive fleets are often referring to "collisions." It's about changing the perception that crashes are sheer happenstance, beyond anyone's control.

The fact is many collisions—85 per cent of them, according to the Canada Safety Council—can be prevented by the driver. Fleet managers are coming to the same realization, and stepping up driver training and tracking programs, to improve safety, reduce costs, and avoid possible litigation.

Chubb Security Systems (Mississauga, Ont.), which has 450 drivers, has been using the term 'collision' for some time now. In 2004, it became part of United Technologies Company (UTC), and began working with UTC's environmental health and safety (EH&S) program, which has a vehicle safety component.

UTC's systematic, company-wide approach to safety and training pervaded its fleet program, as well as Chubb's. Collision rates at Chubb have already dropped by 45 per cent.

The company now reports all collisions to the EH&S department, for their guid-

ance in driver training and safety requirements. For example, if a driver has two collisions in 24 months, his or her driving will be thoroughly reviewed to recommend either tailored training or termination.

Chubb has also become diligent about checking driver abstracts. In the past two years it's improved tracking and monitoring, though the company began focusing on driver responsibility years ago.

Realizing the majority of its collisions could have been avoided with different driver behaviours, Chubb told drivers that in such instances, they would contribute \$250, or half the cost of the repair, whichever was less.

"It definitely resulted in changed behaviours and a decrease in the number of collisions," says John Butler, manager of fleet, risk and property with Chubb.

The company recently installed GPS systems to measure harsh braking—an accurate predictor of the likelihood of a crash. "We noticed that 65 per cent of the collisions involved the vehicles' front or rear ends, which was largely the result of following too closely or not getting out of the way when being tailgated. It allowed



us to focus driver training communications and sessions on those specific situations."

Because Chubb vans are logoed, the company sometimes receives calls about bad driving. Even before talking to the driver, he looks at the operating costs on that driver's vehicle. Typically, their operating costs will be higher (fuel, tire and brake replacements, maintenance) because of their aggressive driving style.

The vehicle operator is interviewed by his manager and the EH&S manager to identify the reasons for the reported action, and to determine an appropriate consequence.

Behaviour modifications usually bring costs in line with the company average and more importantly, improve the odds of the driver returning safely.

"You can definitely predict risk based on driver attitudes and behaviors, which allows a company to be proactive and take preventive action," says Lynn Berberich, vice-president of product management at PHH Arval (Sparks, Md.).

"Some Canadian firms claim they don't look at driver abstracts because it's an invasion of privacy, but I think that's an excuse for not dealing with it."

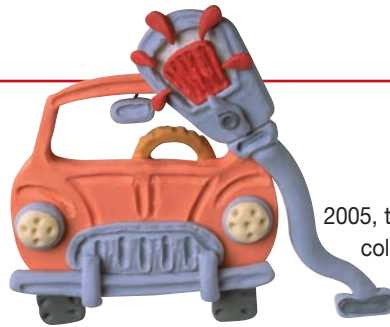
Many companies try to reduce collisions by giving general driver training to everyone. But it might be more effective and less costly to give only at-risk drivers specific training to address their issues, she explains.

In the past, Chubb has offered in-car training but is currently using a defensive driving program administered in regular department meetings. Other companies firmly believe in the power of in-car training and stress the value of real-life road situations as well as the controlled environment of a skid pan.



More than 85 per cent of collisions are preventable, through proper driver training, targeting habits such as following too closely, speeding, and not looking far enough down the road.

PHOTO: B&B STOCK



Regardless of the type of training employed, fleet managers should remember to constantly evaluate and communicate the programs' success. "Metrics are one of the keys to the success of any program," Beberich says. "You must show everyone, from the drivers to management, the program's effects on collision and cost reduction."

On that note, Chubb proudly shares its safety successes with drivers in a variety of ways. "Our drivers know we take fleet safety seriously...Senior executives attend driver meetings several times a year, which—when combined with consistent communication—really shows drivers that the company is firmly committed to safety," Butler says.

Berberich notes the creative and very public approach taken by UPS recently. The courier and logistics company celebrated and recognized all drivers who had been accident-free for 25 years by running their names in a two-page ad in *USA Today*.

Aside from trumpeting the success, it also helps to use cross-functional teams to ensure buy-in and alignment. That way, one department isn't dictating to everyone else on the topic of driver safety. The approach tends to make people more receptive, says Berberich.

## Common habits

Setting up any kind of driver safety program begs the question: what behaviors should managers be concerned about?

"If you're driving too fast for conditions, tailgating, or not looking far enough down the road, you played a role in that collision," says Doug Annett, president of Safe Roads Canada in Oakville, Ont. The organization provides in-vehicle and classroom training across Canada.

"If you were driving, the collision may be your fault, but we can train people to limit the number of errors and lessen their severity. We also help you recognize that when other drivers make mistakes, you don't need to be involved in them.

At first, drivers who experienced a crash may resist the idea. "If you tell them they could have prevented the collision, they look at you like you've got four heads," says a fleet manager, who pre-

ferred to be unnamed.

"They'd rather think they're wonderful drivers and that everyone else is incompetent."

Telling them it's their fault evokes a defensive response, but showing drivers what they can do differently has a highly positive effect. The same unnamed fleet manager reports a 50 per cent reduction in crashes, achieved by new in-car training and a safety communication program.

There are other examples. Ontario Power Generation (Ajax, Ont.) began to tackle driver training and safety in 2003, in its inspection and maintenance services division. That was about the time Heather Langfeld, health and safety program manager for the division came onboard.

She noted on average, the organization's 450 drivers were involved in 15 incidents a year as they racked up more than two million kilometres on the road. The crashes included fender benders and more serious collisions, from being broadsided by a snowplow, to sideswiped by a tractor trailer.

In 2004, she made the 80 drivers who covered more than 10,000 km a year her priority, and sent them off to Safe Roads Canada for skid control school.

In 2005, 75 drivers with slightly less mileage attended. This year, 50 took the course, but all drivers experienced a new computer-based training program. In

2005, there were just four collisions and two incidents—one involving dangerous driving

in a parking lot, resulting in a near-miss. For 2006, there has been just one incident, when a driver spun out on ice but managed to avoid a collision.

"We're celebrating the fact that we're protecting our employees from injury and worse," says Langfeld. "Having driving critiqued by a professional and practising new behaviours and attitudes in real-life on busy highways and city streets has a measurable impact."

Other fleet managers have found success in tailoring training to employees' learning styles. For instance, drivers with the City of Calgary may get hands-on training, a classroom session or computer-based courses.

"You have to look at your resources and use them to maximize results," says Brian Friesen, manager of fleet operations, whose drivers operate 2,400 vehicles.

The final word on the topic goes to Annett, at Safe Roads Canada. Instead of viewing driver safety as a one-time project, he suggests making it a strategic priority. "You need to set and track progress toward safety targets just as you would toward sales," he says. **fm**

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## New safety program

This fall, PHH Arval (Sparks, Md.), a third-party fleet management company with offices in Canada, launched PHH Collision Prevention, a new fleet safety program.

The program is expected to reduce major collision costs by up to 40 per cent by creating a crash-free culture in fleet organizations. It uses technology, consultation, measurement, and a unique patented methodology to:

- Predict at-risk drivers. A recent study indicates five per cent of at-risk drivers account for 45 percent of major collisions;
- Target training to the drivers most likely to have collisions;
- Prevent collisions and reduce risk exposure.

"There has been a significant increase in firms' awareness of their responsibility for driver safety," says Lynn Beberich, vice-president of product management with PHH Arval. "It's been driven by what's going on legislatively and in the courts in Canada and the US, where there have been pretty noteworthy settlements. They recognize the liability risks and economic impact." **fm**