



Risk Management Solutions



Winter 2017

A Quarterly Newsletter of the AMIC/MWCF Loss Control Division

Lowering Workers Compensation Costs

Will Strength • ARM-P • Loss Control Representative • AMIC/MWCF

Many variables impact an organization's workers compensation costs. While most have little control over some factors, such as increasing medical expenses, our Loss Control members can control their premiums by using proven practices that reduce exposures and help contain costs. Therefore, *every* organization should implement a practical safety program to prevent and reduce injuries, accidents and near misses.

Start with Hiring and Safety Orientations

Using a proper selection process and a formal employee safety orientation program helps develop a safe and dependable work environment. It is essential that applicants are properly screened to ensure they are qualified for the position and have a clear understanding of the job expectations. Job descriptions are an important part of this process as they provide vital information on the position's duties, responsibilities, physical requirements and working conditions. Having the position clearly defined helps you choose the appropriate applicant which, in turn, reduces injuries.

Generally, the selection process for most positions must go further than just an interview. Once the best candidate has been identified, a few additional steps should be taken such as checking motor vehicle records, substance abuse checks, criminal background checks and any necessary background checks related to education, employment history, required licenses or certifications.

Once the best person has been hired, make sure the new employee gets off to the right start with a *documented* safety orientation session that covers the general safety policies of your organization as well as any specific safety issues within their specific department. Safety orientation sessions should be designed to help new employees understand their roles and responsibilities in your safety program and your organization's mission in regards to safety.

Continue with Training

Whether working at a desk, collecting trash or chasing criminals, all employees need to consider their safety and the safety of fellow employees. This goal is made possible when employees have been trained often and made aware of safety through classes, hands on training, safety posters and reminders. Effective employee training should:

Encourage employee input. The traditional lecture with the presenter doing all the talking makes it far too easy for the audience to lose interest and place their attention elsewhere. (How many are checking their phones instead of listening attentively?) Asking for input and involvement throughout the class will keep attendees engaged in the learning process and provide a subtle reminder that they play an active role in workplace safety. *Specific* issues involving *their* work practices will hold their interest better than vague safety rules.

Tell stories. Rules tend to be boring. Stories make things real, relevant and memorable. If you can convey information about a rule through a story, you'll improve attention and retention. Make it real. Make it relevant.

Encourage questions. Always urge employees to ask questions because everyone (including the presenters) learns from those questions. Neither the audience nor the presenter should assume that something is appropriate or a best practice just because it's always been done a certain way.

The AMIC/MWCF Loss Control Division provides many resources to assist you with training your employees. Please visit www.losscontrol.org to learn more about our safety library, annual loss control seminars, fire extinguisher training, SkidCar training, FATS (firearms simulator) training and online training through Local GovU.

If an accident does occur:

All claims should be reported immediately upon notification to the employer. Claims can be reported in several ways. Members of the Municipal Workers Comp Fund (MWCF) can report work injury claims 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by filling out the "First Report of Injury Form"

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Reducing Costs continued from cover

and emailing the form to FROI@mrm-llc.com or faxing to (205) 263-0503. You can download a copy of the latest “First Report of Injury Form”, as well as find helpful resources for completing it, on MWCF’s dedicated website at www.almwcf.org/claims.

First Report of Injury submissions should be as complete as possible so the claim can be examined properly. Early reporting of claims and complete submissions are crucial steps in the claims management process. It is also essential to work with the claims adjusters and keep them aware of any circumstances that may arise regarding the claim. Active management of workers compensation claims can effectively reduce time away from work and associated costs. Supervisors and employees need to fully understand the importance of the first report of injury. Timeliness, along with accurate and complete information, is important in order for the workers compensation process to operate effectively and efficiently.

In addition, a thorough investigation process is one of the most essential elements of any safety program. Incident investigations are specifically designed to determine the cause(s) of the accident so appropriate preventative measures can be taken. It is important to learn why the accident happened, make changes that prevent repeat accidents and make employees aware of hazards. It is also important to answer the basic questions of who, when, where, why and how the accident occurred. An accident is unfortunate, costly and can cause untold suffering. Effective accident investigation procedures will uncover the details of how and why the event happened. These procedures should be designed to discover the facts, *not* assess blame. Without an accident investigation, the incident is more likely to repeat because appropriate preventative measures were not implemented.

Review your claims on a regular basis, making sure department managers and supervisors are aware of the claims. MWCF has a team of professional adjusters within its Claims Department who work hand-in-hand with dedicated case managers to continually monitor large claims and work with injured employees and members to oversee, review and develop ways to implement cost containment procedures and return employees to work.

Bringing the Employee Back to Work

It is possible to reduce lost-time accident costs and help injured employees become productive sooner by establishing a return-to-work program before the accident. Key to a successful program is identifying alternative productive work in advance of the need. *An effective program anticipates rather than reacts to loss.* If an employee is physically unable to perform former duties, a common-sense solution is to return the employee to temporary alternative work assignments that are essential yet physically less demanding while always adhering to any doctor’s work restrictions.

Benefits of a Return-to-Work Program

A Return-to-Work Program is a benefit for everyone involved including the employer, employee and the insurance provider. It speeds the recovery process – the mental aspects of being at work are beneficial (as opposed to sitting at home feeling frustrated) and contact with coworkers helps maintain a positive morale. It also helps the employee avoid using sick pay benefits or other disability benefits so those can be saved for other times and the employee continues to accumulate time towards retirement.

In addition, the employer has several incentives to get the employee back to work quickly. By shortening the amount of time injured employees are away from work, a Return-to-Work Program can reduce the cost of claims, which, in turn, will lower the organization’s premiums. (The longer an employee is off work, the greater cost of a workers compensation claim and vice versa.) Getting experienced employees back to work also results in less time and money spent on recruiting and hiring. (The longer the employee is off work, the greater the likelihood the employee will never return to work.)

Periodically communicating with injured employees lets them know that you care about their health and getting them back to work. An employee is more likely to report back to work sooner if the employee knows he or she is coming back to an organization that cares about them. A contact person should be available to explain benefits and answer questions the employee may have.

Good communication also includes expressing a sincere regard for the injured employee’s quick recovery and return to productive work as well as encouraging the employee to follow physician instructions while off work and after returning to work.

Monitor Progress and Assess Your Program

The Loss Control Division provides assistance and information to members in many ways. For example, loss control visits keep members up-to-date on trends and issues. Surveys are conducted to detect, eliminate and control exposures or risks that contribute to accidents. Loss control seminars and training resources help enhance the skills of your employees. For assistance developing a safety program for your organization or assessing your current program, visit www.losscontrol.org or contact your Loss Control Representative at 334-262-2566.

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of several time-tested ways to control workers compensation costs. Since there are some factors that are difficult to control and can cause compensation costs to increase, employers should do all that can be done to manage those costs that can be impacted. In addition to the information discussed above, other points to consider are: good housekeeping, use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), written safety policies, defensive driver training, planning properly, jobsite inspections, pre-employment physicals, vehicle and equipment maintenance programs, safety incentive programs, and MWCF’s **discount programs**.

MWCF provides three discount programs that all members are eligible for: Safe Workplace Guidelines, Medical Protocol and a Post-Accident Drug Testing Program. Members adopting these programs will receive a three percent discount *per program*. As an added incentive to adopt these programs, members who adopt all three discount programs receive an additional one percent discount, meaning a full 10% discount on their workers compensation premium. **For more information on MWCF discounts, please contact Richard Buttenshaw at 334-262-2566. ■**

It’s Time for Workers Comp Payroll Audits

It is time for the annual payroll audits for 2016. Some MWCF members will be subject to an independent audit from Overland Solutions, and those members will be contacted to set up an appointment. Members who are not subject to the independent audit, will be receiving an Audit Request Form in the mail. Please fill in this form according to the instructions provided and return as soon as possible to our underwriters at Millennium Risk Managers.

All audit information is due by March 31, 2017. If you have not received a request by 1/31/17 or have any questions, please call Carla Thienpont at Millennium Risk Managers 1-888-736-0210.

Fender Bender Blues

Terry Sanders • Police Safety Consultant • AMIC/MWCF

During a recent loss control visit with a police department, the chief asked me what type claims are our highest. I quickly responded traffic accidents. Ninety plus percent of all our claims involve car crashes and of these a high percentage are minor, “avoidable” fender benders. This article will address some primary causes of car crashes as well as preventative measures municipal drivers can take to help your departments avoid the “Fender Bender Blues”.

More than a century before the first automobile was ever driven, Benjamin Franklin probably gave future drivers the best advice when it comes to safety: **“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”** There is “cause and effect” when it comes to these types of crashes and a good safety program can reduce losses. Putting an organization on autopilot concerning safety is a disaster. That being said, safety must be promoted at the top of an organization. In order to reduce claims, mayors and department heads must take the lead in this area. With this in mind, let’s look at some measures municipalities can take to reduce their losses.

First, an important part of a municipality’s overall fleet management program should include regularly scheduled vehicle inspections for potential safety issues such as lights, brakes, tire wear and pressure. These inspections should also include a *thorough* check for any vision obstructions. In police vehicles pay particular attention to the placement of shotgun and long rifle racks or any other equipment that may block a driver’s view. This is particularly true in K-9 vehicles. It should also be in a *written* policy for employees to regularly inspect assigned vehicles. **A sample inspection form can be accessed at our website, www.losscontrol.org, under “Reference Documents”.**

Emergency runs by police officers are obviously where the more serious accidents occur. One way to reduce these potential deadly occurrences is to have a good “Emergency Vehicle Operation” policy that is *enforced*. This policy should state that whenever an officer is making an emergency run (lights and siren), communications must be notified. This adds accountability and affords patrol supervisors the ability to monitor and consider whether a full emergency response is necessary. Keep in mind that all traffic accidents and domestic violence calls do not require a full emergency run. Policy must clearly state that **ALL** emergency runs will necessitate **BOTH** “lights” and “siren” – **visual** and **audible** (Alabama Code - Section 32-5-213). This is a critical policy that officers must document through their annual training.

A municipality has an obligation to review all traffic accidents involving their personnel. To accomplish this, the city should establish a Vehicle Accident Review Board to review every traffic accident to help determine cause and make recommendations. The main objectives of this review board are to reduce injuries, lower overall exposure to liability and prevent future traffic accidents. This Board can determine the following: negligence or no negligence on driver’s part, training issues that need to be addressed, policy issues that need to be addressed, safety equipment/seatbelts used/not used or other safety rules not followed. **An excellent model Accident Review Board policy can be accessed online at www.losscontrol.org under “Reference Documents”.**

Safety equipment can also help reduce accidents. Municipalities should spec all new vehicles with backup cameras. These cameras are both affordable and effective. The benefit far outweighs the cost.

According to research conducted by PHH Arval (formerly PHH Vehicle Management Services), the second-largest fleet management company in the world, **parking lot accidents are the most common way fleet vehicles are damaged**. In 2012, around 20 percent of fleet accidents occurred while parked or during parking. The report stated that basic defensive driving can help minimize collisions in these situations. PHH Arval also pointed out that 25 percent of all parking lot accidents are caused by vehicles backing up and that in the United States, about 4 percent of automobile accident fatalities – or approximately 1,000 deaths each year – are caused by blind spots. The AMIC/MWCF Loss Control Division offers excellent defensive driving training through our SkidCar program. Information can be accessed online at www.losscontrol.org, under Quick Links, SkidCar. Our free video library as well as our free online training provided by LocalGovU are excellent training resources available to all our insureds.

Rear-end collisions are also a problem with municipal drivers mainly for the following reasons:

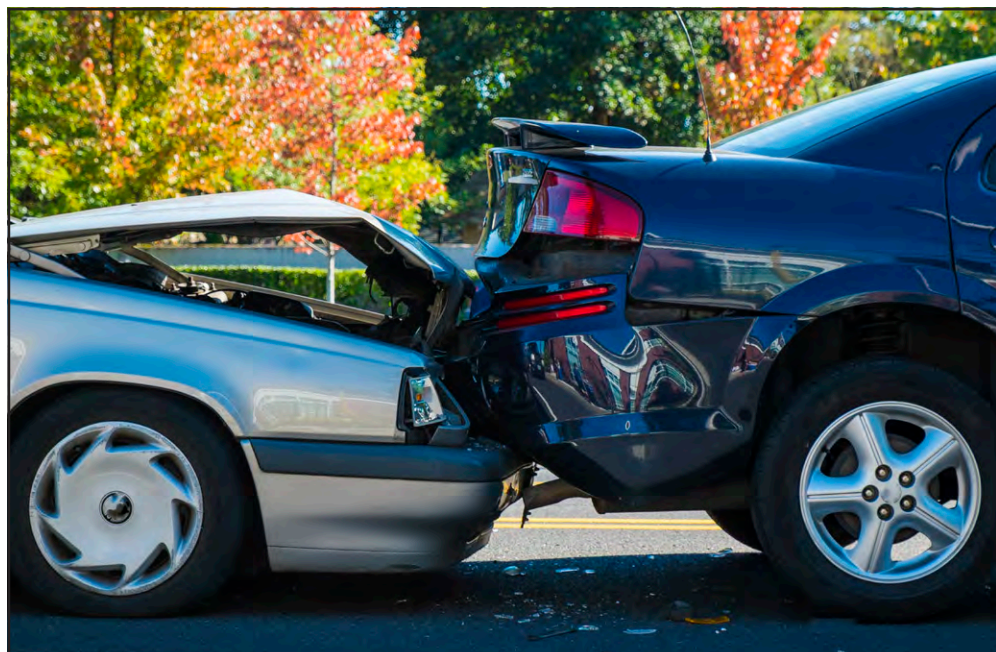
Following too close. Remember the “3 Second Rule” – an easy way to determine that you are following at a safe distance. Find a stationary point such as a road sign or building that is even with the vehicle in front of you. If you reach the stationary point before you can count to three, you are driving too close and need to drop back. During wet, icy, curvy or low visibility conditions you need to increase your following distance.

Distractions. The number one culprit here is the cell phone. Municipalities should have written policy that – at a minimum – restrict cell phone usage to *hands-free only while operating vehicles*. However, keep in mind that even during hands-free operation, your entire focus is not on your driving. According to an August 9, 2016 news article by Kelly Wallace of CNN, a study by the University of Utah found that while it may seem safer, using a phone hands-free can be just as dangerous. The study found that using a handheld or hands-free device while driving could result in a slower reaction time than if you were legally drunk. **A sample Cell Phone policy can be obtained at www.losscontrol.org under “Reference Documents”.** In addition, police vehicles are full of distractions such as traffic radar, mobile data computers, dash cameras, two-way radios and more. A written Vehicle Operation policy should address this as well.

Another common cause of rear-end collisions occurs when drivers are attempting to enter the flow of traffic while looking back at an angle for clearance when another vehicle in front also entering traffic makes a sudden stop. Marked police cars are even more at risk for this type collision because motorists will sometimes stop twice for fear of the officer stopping them for “failure to stop” – the vehicle in front begins to enter traffic and you began to move while looking back; the front vehicle makes a sudden stop resulting in a rear-end crash leaving you crying the “Fender Bender Blues”.

There is nothing more embarrassing than for a police officer to be responding to a private property accident and, while driving through a shopping area parking lot looking for the involved vehicles, to crash his/her marked police cruiser for all to see! This happens more than you realize. Question: can a police officer find a light pole in the middle of an empty shopping center parking lot at 2:00 am while checking businesses? Answer: Yes – and they won’t be the first!

Municipal employment vehicles are a tool of the trade with many employees spending the majority of their work day in them. Risk is always a factor; however, agencies that are proactive with safety programs, have good written policy, proper safety equipment and training can and will keep their losses down. More importantly, these municipalities will keep their most valuable assets – their people – safe. **Keep safety first and you won’t be left crying the “Fender Bender Blues”.** ■



2017 SkidCar Schedule

Through an advanced, computer-controlled driver training vehicle known as the SkidCar System, trainees learn how to react quickly and safely to a range of hazardous driving conditions. Training is conducted throughout the state at a minimal cost. Visit www.losscontrol.org for more information.

Jan. 24 – Feb. 3	Montgomery
Feb. 21 – March 3	Dothan/Cottonwood
March 21 - 31	Huntsville
April 18 – 28	Oneonta
May 16 – 26	Moody



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- 5.062-DVD - A DUI Story... What If?
- 5.063-DVD - Defensive Driving for Government Employees
- 5.067-DVD - Distracted Driving (Focus on Texting and Driving)
- 5.068-DVD - Defensive Driving: 15-Passenger Vans
- 7.044-DVD - Space Heaters
- 7.109-DVD - Working Safely in Cold Weather
- 7.129-DVD - The Buried Truth Uncovered with Eric Giguere
- 7.130-DVD - Drowsy Driving: It's Your Wake Up Call
- 7.133-DVD - The Top Five Things You Need to Know About the Flu
- 7.148-DVD - Blink! A Practical Approach to Workplace Stretching
- 7.149-DVD - A Better Way to Lift (with Michael Melnik)
- 8.013-DVD - An Introduction to the Globally Harmonized System (GHS)
- 10.010-DVD - Office Ergonomics: It's Your Move

Video/DVD requests to: Rachel Wagner at: 334-262-2566;
rachelw@alalm.org; or FAX at 334-263-0200.

Defining Moment

Drone Liability Coverage



AMIC has added **FREE** liability coverage for drones weighing five (5) pounds or less. To add this coverage to your policy, AMIC requires the drone serial number and description as well as the department using the drone. If you have questions or wish to add this coverage, please contact your insurance representative. For additional information on AMIC and its services, visit www.amicentral.org.