Motor Vehicle Incidents
Who's Responsible For The Leading Cause of Work-Related Fatalities?

Is driving an occupational hazard?

Statistics say "Yes!" From 1999 to 2002, motor vehicle incidents (MVI's) accounted for 38% of all traumatic fatalities, making it the leading cause of work-related fatalities in Ontario, far ahead of machinery-related incidents (15%) and falls (14%).

MVI-related fatalities occur in three categories: highway collisions, highway non-collisions, and non-highway collisions. According to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) database, the number of fatalities for each of the three categories were almost the same in 1996. Since then, the number of highway non-collision and non-highway collision fatalities initially declined and then remained almost constant. However, the number of fatalities related to highway collisions has increased and, in 2003, accounted for more than 80% of MVI-related fatalities.

Data based on all industrial sectors over that time period show that the leading sectors in terms of number of MVI's were transportation, services and construction. In the education sector, MVI's occur far less frequently than in many of the other sectors. According to the WSIB, the sector has not recorded a fatality for some time, and there have been, on average, just over 10 Lost-Time Injuries due to MVI's every year.

With the increasing frequency of MVI's in Ontario, how can education sector firms protect their good records in this area?

One way is for firms to be aware that driving is an occupational hazard, so the first step is recognition of that hazard. Executive officers who know that they employ workers who drive as part of their job must make sure that adequate policies and procedures are in place to protect them. This is an area where input from the Joint Health and Safety Committee can be especially valuable.

At the same time, employers need to understand and accept their responsibility for ensuring the safety of employees who drive as part of their work duties, a responsibility that exists even when employees use their own vehicles.

Much of the written material dealing with the prevention of Motor Vehicle Incidents focuses on the responsibility of the worker – driving safely, obeying traffic laws,

staying alert and even taking defensive driving training. Although this focus has some value, much of the responsibility for driving safety still begins with the employer.

Here are some questions to help employers review their driving safety policies and procedures (firms without driving safety programs can use these questions as a template to create one): Do you
• Have a clear Safe Driving Policy that is communicated regularly to all employees who drive as part of their job?

• Have a maintenance program for all company-owned vehicles and require proof of mechanical fitness for personal vehicles?
• Require all of your employees who drive as part of their job to have a valid driver's license for the class of vehicle driven?
• Require a driver's abstract from the Ministry of Transportation on a regular basis for all employees who drive as part of their job?
• Try to minimize driving where possible (delivery from firms providing office supplies, teleconferences to reduce travel, etc.)?
• Allow sufficient travel time for moving between worksites, making deliveries or returning from off-site meetings?
• Limit the number of hours employees can drive without a rest break?
• Require driving during rush hours, or reschedule some tasks for times when there is less traffic (especially important in school zones at the beginning and end of the school day)?
• Require highway driving (where most MVI-related fatalities occur), or permit other modes of transportation when attending out-of-town meetings?
• Expect those attending meetings out of town to work a full day before driving to the meeting during the evening or night, or require them to return after a full day of meetings?
• Provide Defensive Driving Training, or Skid School Training, for full-time drivers?

Employees need to know how employers expect them to drive while on the job. But it's not enough to simply "expect" everyone to drive safely. Clear policies supported by enforced programs and procedures create a safe driving culture in the workplace. Those behind the wheel play an important role in avoiding motor vehicle incidents, a role made much easier by the support of their employers.