

# Leveling the Safety Playing Field

BY CHRIS WOLSKI

At-risk executive drivers need to be held accountable for their poor driving records in the same way as rank-and-file employees. Fleet managers need to use a slightly different approach to help them become safer drivers.

Safety has become a byword of today's corporate fleet policies. While the principles for handling at-risk drivers are well established, it can get tricky when the problem is in the C-Suite.

The good news is that this Catch-22 has a solution that will help these at-risk executives remain safe and sound, protect the company's bottom line, and minimize headaches and the possibility of career suicide for fleet managers.

## Accepting No Excuses

One of the biggest challenges for fleet managers is that a minority of executives feel fleet policies are designed only for front-line employees, and not for them.

"We see many cases, for example, where executives excuse themselves from company-mandated training programs," said Art Liggio, president of Driving Dynamics. "While this is seldom discussed or challenged in an open forum, it is a regular point of discussion by fleet and safety professionals. Not only does it concern them that their internal clients are

at risk, but it makes the job of promoting safe driving initiatives throughout the organization more difficult."

The most common way to identify at-risk drivers is examining driving infractions found in MVRs and crash reports. These reports can help fleet managers identify red flags that could open the company to liability.

Liggio cited research from the American Transportation Research Institute that showed a single moving violation "dramatically" increases the likelihood of becoming involved in a crash.

"So, regardless of what position a person holds, a poor driving record should be of concern to both the employer and the executive," Liggio said.

Unfortunately, it's more typical that the executive driver's poor driving record is discovered only after a crash occurs.

"Company fleet managers generally are not privy to driving records of executives," said Robert Martines, founder, president, and CEO of Corporate Claims Management (CCM). "In most instances, they only learn of the infraction usually by the secretary of the executive looking for direction on what to do. In many instances the fleet manager learns of it when a body shop or dealership calls them looking for payment of a repair. We have found that, when an executive is cited for an infraction, especially DUI, the fleet manager is drawn into the claim to expedite the process as the com-

pany tries to mitigate the problem ASAP. Very rarely is an executive labeled a problem driver."

Approaching an at-risk executive driver can be a touchy subject, but it can be done by appeal to principles of both legal and corporate citizenship.

"I would express to the executive that, from the legal point of view, it's the right thing to do. I'd express to them that, from the corporate perspective, it's the right thing to do to provide the employee and this leader of the organization the appropriate training — but the goal would be

to get to work safely and get home safely. Express it more from a concern standpoint than a penalization standpoint," suggested Jeff Fender, vice president, sales and marketing for Fleet Response.

But, the fleet manager has to take into account that the executive needs to be treated fairly and proper corporate procedures are followed.

"Recognizing privacy concerns, other executives should not be brought into this process when a fellow executive falters," Liggio said. "Only the executive's superior and the person(s) responsible

for safety compliance — HR, fleet manager, EHS manager — should be involved in the remediation."

## Holding Drivers Accountable

Critically, fleets need to hold both rank-and-file employees and executives accountable to the same safe driving rules

## AT A GLANCE

At-risk executive drivers can be resistant to taking part in a fleet safety program. To ensure participation, fleet managers should:

- Get senior executive support for the safety program.
- Develop a program that is equally applicable to all drivers no matter their position in the company.
- Enforce the executive-oriented policy with the help of the executive team.
- Make a personal appeal to the executive using data and common sense.



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and fleet policies.

“It is critical that an employer’s fleet safety policy is well communicated to all employees and it clearly defines the company’s process for improving unsatisfactory driving performance,” Liggio said. “This said, the employer’s fleet safety policy must be role-agnostic, and this fact communicated by the top executive in the company to the other members of the executive team. The next step applies to all roles within a company.”

Beyond simply letting employees and executives know that they are all subject to the same policy, the contents of the policy need to be clearly communicated.

“It is important that everyone know how their driving performance is measured and what the consequences are for deviations in the company standards,” Liggio added. “Both remediation methods and escalated adverse actions should be identified so everyone knows and understands what will occur if the standards are not met. When all of this is adequately put in place, it provides the fleet manager with the proper facts and tools to help the executive achieve company safety standards.”

Key to effectiveness is taking “judgment” out of the equation and to simply look at the facts of the driving records.

“I firmly believe that the rules must apply across the board to all employees regardless of position when it applies to safety training, MVRs, and accidents,” said Martines of CCM. “When we designed our FleetGuard safety program, we programmed the system to eliminate the ‘human’ element. FleetGuard evalu-

ates a driver by their driving record, accidents, and MVRs.”

The bottom line: data is data.

“In our system, no points are higher or lower. Neither ‘good behavior’ or a good employee, a great salesperson, friendship, or length of employment, nor any other asset, is factored into the assessment,” Martines said. “The system evaluates each driver individually and makes the necessary recommendations for the client to approve in an effort to train the driver properly and comply with company requirements. By using a system that is impersonal, a company can be assured of setting rules that are set in stone as well as make sure all interventions are based on facts.”

Impartiality is the primary key to success.

“Our system, DriverCare, treats executives exactly the same way as every other driver,” said Brian Kiniry, senior director of strategic account services for the CEI Group. “When an event like a ticket or an accident results in the executive being placed in a higher risk category, he or she may be notified by e-mail and assigned remedial driving lessons, or may be subject to other sanctions that the company deems appropriate and specifies in its fleet safety policy. In addition to the executive receiving that e-mail, our solution allows the opportunity for the fleet manager and the executive’s direct superior to be copied as well. For serious events — such as a DUI or an accident involving a fatal-

ity — HR and the legal department may also be notified.”

There is another way to build impartiality into the system: a committee approach.

“One of the ways that we’ve seen clients address impartiality is with a fleet safety committee,” said Jodie Varner, director of business development for Fleet Response. “That safety committee, as a team, figures out action plans for drivers. So, that gives you a little bit of the ability to consider who the driver is and what the action plan is.”

Again, according to Varner, you want consistency.

“What we’ve seen fleets do with our product is, we identify a driver as high risk and it goes to the committee which consists of people from fleet, risk, and safety discussing what action plan that driver should have. And, this is when you can address the issue of the driver being an executive — because, with an executive, you have it addressed by another executive, but if it’s a front-line employee you have a supervisor do it,” Varner said.

### Creating the ‘Ah-Ha’ Moment

While no fleet manager wants to have to address the issue of an at-risk driver, there can be a silver lining when working with an at-risk executive driver.

“Misery loves company,” said Fender of Fleet Response. “If a senior level management person can walk up in front of a group of employees and say, ‘I have my issues, too, and this is what we’re going to do about it,’ then there might be less push back or negative feelings when some of the rank and file have the same issues.”

When working with an at-risk driver at any level, the goal is always the same.

“The goal is to create that ‘Ah-ha!’ moment in which the driver acknowledges and personalizes that there is a problem and must be corrected,” said Liggio of Driving Dynamics.

But, an executive driver doesn’t have to be a problem in order to have an “Ah-ha” moment.

“Even if all of executives weren’t the problem — or you only had one who was having problems — have all the executives go through the driving program,



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have them champion the cause. Then they can tell employees, ‘We did it, we support it for the betterment of the organization, and you,’” Fender said.

This executive support, no matter the motivation, is imperative to selling safety to the rest of the executive team and rank-and-file alike.

“Highly visible senior executive support of a fleet’s safety initiatives is vital for them to be effective,” said Kinniry of CEI. “CEI has produced customized safety videos for fleets that feature their senior executives talking about recent accident trends and their effect on the company. Our customers who have used these videos believe they’ve been very effective in building their safety culture, particularly with new hires.”

### Saying it with Data

While it is vital to establish a policy and an equitable way to enforce it, the policy won’t work if executive leadership isn’t behind it.

The good news is that most fleet managers work for companies that take safety seriously.

However, at-risk executive drivers can resist and push back much more than a rank-and-file employee, so making a convincing argument for the benefits of the safety program and adhering to it is just as crucial.

“Since so many executives are data driven, I believe a good starting point is to review the company’s overall safety performance data, identify where the executive’s own performance deviates, help the executive personalize what may be at risk at and beyond the job, and identify the usual root causes for the driver’s poor safety performance. Get the executive to verbalize what he or she believes is at issue, and then seek acknowledgement for the opportunity to improve and agreement to use the company’s remedial protocol, e.g., online training,” said Liggio of Driving Dynamics.

Martines of CCM also advised on making the argument personal.

“Everyone has a weak spot in their ‘armor,’ executives included. No one wishes any harm to a loved one, especially due to careless or negligent driving,” he said. “Promoting safe driving via a classroom

## FLEET SAFETY CONFERENCE PROVIDES FUEL FOR THOUGHT

Fleet managers and stakeholders can add to their safety toolboxes by attending the upcoming Fleet Safety Conference.

Among the highlights of the upcoming conference will be the opening keynote: “How to Create a Successful Corporate Safety Culture — Shell’s Journey to Goal Zero” by Mike Watson, Shell’s global road safety manager.

General sessions include “How EHS/Fleet Professionals Can Engage Senior Leadership to Provide Management and Financial Support for Corporate Safety Programs,” by Joseph McKillips, CSP, senior manager commercial program support global EHS&E for Abbott; and “Latest Industry Initiatives to Reduce Deaths and Injuries Associated with Distracted Driving,” by David Teater, senior director, transportation initiatives for the National Safety Council.

Attendees will also have the opportunity to take part in concurrent sessions drilling down into regulations, technology, and best practices. Concurrent sessions will be focused specifically on either light-duty or heavy-duty vehicles.

In addition, there will be plenty of opportunities for attendees to network.

The Fleet Safety Conference will be held July 13-15 at the Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center Hotel in Schaumburg, Ill. For more information or to register go to [www.fleetsafetyconference.com](http://www.fleetsafetyconference.com).



or online training, videos, or any other method that shows the reality of a bad situation as well as the good — such as returning home to a family safely — is a great message, which provides proven results.”

### Judging on an Equal Playing Field

One thing both fleet and risk managers as well as the executive suite need to keep in mind is that corporate status will mean little outside the confines of an executive boardroom once a serious incident occurs.

This is particularly the case when it comes to having a well-defined and enforced safety policy.

“Any deviation from safety enforcement procedures opens the fleet up to potentially very costly liability if the fleet driver is at fault and didn’t receive the same treatment as all other employees,” said Kinniry of CEI. “The chain of your safety program and your protection against liability is only as strong as its weakest link. I don’t think judges and juries make any distinction between a salesman or service driver and a senior executive when it comes to liability for a fatal accident.”

In extremely rare cases, a fleet manager

may find himself or herself in a situation where he or she is being forced to implement a scaled down or two-tier safety policy that they don’t support. In this rare case, Fender of Fleet Response had some simple advice.

“At least, get it documented that you recommended the same treatment for all,” he said.

### Taking a Proactive Approach

Perhaps the biggest mistake fleets make in relation to their executive drivers is waiting until a problem occurs instead of proactively establishing a uniform fleet policy to address at-risk drivers on every rung of the corporate ladder proactively.

“Awareness is one of the keys to accident avoidance,” said Martines of CCM. “Sadly, many company executives of all ages, male and female, disregard safety and consider it a pure expense with no return of investment. I find it repulsive they take the approach, ‘It has not happened to us,’ or ‘Why spend the money when we have attorneys to defend us?’ or ‘I don’t drive much so it does not affect me.’ These are just a few of the many exact quotes I have heard. All I say to them is, ‘What is a life worth?’” ■