

TRUCKING TIPS

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A recent article on the web raised some interesting issues for trucking companies:

Researchers at the University of Arkansas recommend that trucking companies and transportation policymakers take a *holistic* approach to truck safety, and they have suggestions for where to start. “While focusing on the ‘human factor’ and its role in traffic crashes, it is important that we use a *holistic* approach, which advocates a *systems approach* of reducing traffic crashes among truck drivers,” the researchers recommend in a forthcoming article in *Performance Improvement Quarterly*. According to the article the researchers, Fredrick Muyia Nafukho, Barbara E. Hinton and Carroll M. Graham, found that there has been only limited research on the performance of tractor trailer drivers and the reduction of road traffic crashes. They examined a year’s worth of data for 14,340 drivers employed by a major trucking company to “learn” about driver performance. The article suggests that they found that a majority of the drivers in the study – 80.73 percent – had good performance records.

The researchers in the article also advocate an approach that goes beyond the experience of the drivers to look at broader factors. “To focus on truck drivers alone to improve drivers’ performance and increased revenue for the transportation company would be misleading,” the researchers concluded. “The drivers operate at the individual level. But critical to the success of any organization are the individual, process, and organizational performance levels.” A holistic approach would involve “identification of traffic problems, formulation of a national strategy to address the problems and setting of targets and performance monitoring mechanisms,” according to Nafukho, Hinton and Graham.

The article suggests that hours of driving, experience and age of drivers, while important, are not the primary cause of accidents. Instead, the “*holistic*” approach to the evaluation projects the burden on the companies employing, training and directing the drivers. The article and the researchers acknowledge that the sampling for their research was limited and at this time a copy of the data is not available for analysis of the underlying theories.

However, companies can take away one significant fact from the article. The focus by various groups and, more importantly, the litigation community, is shifting from individual driver responsibility to corporate and company responsibility – placing the company in the role of ensuring a safe system for driving. In most cases, the emphasis is being placed on the company’s failure in hiring, monitoring, training and supervising the driver. Companies must recognize the potential juror’s perception of this “*holistic*” approach within society as well in the litigation arena. Careful and consistent analysis of employment and safety practices has a large role in determining liability and responsibility in accidents.

A few moments of review and update of your records could be vital in establishing your defense during litigation following a tragic accident. Is it worth your time?

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