

Driver Selection

For employees hired with driving as a secondary work duty

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Employees in the medical transportation field are typically hired to perform one primary job duty, however, they may sometimes have a secondary responsibility that includes driving.

Introduction

Employees in the medical transportation field are often hired to perform one primary job function, but an additional responsibility may also include driving. For example, an Emergency Medical Technician's primary role is to respond to incidents and save lives, however, they may also be tasked with driving an ambulance to the scene of an accident. This added responsibility presents an exposure to the ambulance company, the employees, as well as the general public.

Discussion

When a driver is hired, he comes with some degree of driving experience. However, his driving skill can range from inexperienced to highly experienced. Because driving experience is unique to each individual, it is influenced by a variety of factors, such as whether the driver has or has not experienced:

- City, suburban, or rural driving
- Different vehicle types
- Heavy or light traffic patterns
- Interstate or highway driving
- Distractions, both inside and outside the vehicle
- Changing weather conditions

Guidance

Because people have such different driving behaviors, habits, and abilities, employers are challenged with the very difficult and important task of selecting good drivers. Effective fleet management begins with the selection of good drivers. The quality of the driver's job performance affects the success of the entire fleet operation and directly influences fleet safety performance. Every effort must be made to select the most qualified person for the job. Temporary, occasional and full-time employees who drive for the organization should be selected in the same manner because they all represent the same type of risk by operating a motor vehicle on behalf of your organization.

Establish driver qualifications

Management's first step in selecting drivers is to establish a meaningful and realistic driver qualification program. The employee may be the best at what they were hired to do, but maybe their driving skills are lacking. Well defined job standards should be based on objective criteria and reflect the necessary prerequisites and skills for satisfactory job performance. Consideration must also be given any federal, state and local motor vehicle rules and regulations. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs) only apply to the operation of a commercial motor vehicle. At a minimum, the following should be included:

Job description and duties

Fully describe the specific nature of the position in order to recognize the best applicant. Determine exactly what the associate must do, how it must be accomplished, and include both driving and non-driving aspects of the job. Written job descriptions should be developed or reviewed at each corporate location to determine which jobs require use of an owned or non-owned vehicle on company business. From this information, the essential job functions of each position, as well as the experience, skill level and other qualifications need to be summarized. Apply these standards equally for all job candidates to assure fair hiring practices.

Physical qualifications

Once the nature of the position is established, describe the minimum physical attributes required to perform the job, i.e., vision, hearing, health history, and substance abuse. When establishing these qualifications, determine if the driver is subject to the FMCSRs and/or State regulations that require physical exams, and apply any minimum qualifications where required. Medical Advisory Criteria has been established by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) to provide "guidance" in assisting the medical examiner in determining a commercial driver's medical qualifications.

Background requirements

Describe the experience prerequisites the applicant should possess for the job, such as level of education, amount of past training, previous driving experience, and degree of driving skill. If the job requires the driver to maintain a Commercial Driver's License (CDL), additional training/experience may be required under the FMCSRs, and should be addressed in the experience requirements. Examples of such may include, but are not limited to, entry level driver training, job-specific situations (e.g. ambulance's driving at excessive speeds and passing through red lights), etc. The candidate's past driving record should also be included in these requirements.

General abilities and aptitudes

To round out the driver qualifications, some less specific requirements might also be included. A "good driver profile" described by the National Safety Council includes the driver's ability to:

- Avoid accidents
- Follow traffic regulations
- Care for the vehicle
- Meet schedules
- Get along with others
- Adapt to existing conditions

Although these may seem basic, they can be an important factor in successfully hiring good qualified drivers. Remember, these employees are most likely going to be hired with a title other than "driver". Just because an applicant has driven a car or truck for many years, this does not mean their experience transfers into the specific driving tasks of your organization's operation. Your organization may have different kinds of vehicles than what the applicant has driven in the past. Perhaps your organization is stricter on what kind, and how many, driving violations are allowed. Dig deep when reviewing applications and in interviews. Determine where additional training may be needed.

Driver selection procedures

Drivers who meet well established criteria will usually have the desired qualifications not only to perform their jobs but to do so safely. A variety of informational resources and techniques are available to assist management in the driver selection process, such as the ANSI Z15.1-2012 Safe Practices for Motor Vehicle Operations, which is an industry best practices standard.

Recruiting

Attracting well-qualified applicants is the first step in the selection process. Advertisements should target qualified applicants only. Minimum requirements for the position should be highlighted in the ad to help streamline the selection process. Keep in mind that the advertisement should mention that driving is a part of the position, and possibly list the type of vehicle to be driven. Applicants can be selected from a wide variety of sources, including promoting present associates, referrals from present associates, industry contacts, walk-ins, web-based and newspaper advertisements, or trade associations.

Application form

The employment application is the first source of information about prospective associates. It is a valuable tool for narrowing down the field of applicants to those best qualified for the position. The form should contain only questions pertaining to the applicant's ability to perform the job. Essential information should include personal data, such as name, address, telephone number, previous employers, past position descriptions, period of employment, salary, and immediate supervisors. Examine the application prior to the interview and inquire about any gaps in employment. Make sure the applicant's driving experience is in the same type of vehicle that the position will require the employee to drive. For example, an ambulance driver position should require some driving experience in an ambulance. This sounds basic, but having the correct driving experience is very important, and often is overlooked assuming that driving is the same in all vehicle types.

Applications can be internal company forms. They can also be obtained from general office supply stores or from industry vendors. Regardless of where the form is obtained, it is important that it be administered according to fair hiring laws and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) guidelines.

Interviewing

Hold interviews in a relaxed atmosphere. Remember that the interview is a "conversation with a purpose" designed to obtain more information about the applicant. Verify or expand on information in the application form by encouraging applicants to talk about past employment, training, and other qualifications. This process helps the interviewer form an opinion about the applicant's employment attitude, work ethics, driving ability, and safety attitude. In addition, the applicant should gain a clear understanding of what the job involves and what the company can offer. Any discrepancies on the job application should be addressed during the interview. For example, if the applicant marked "no accidents" on the application, but the Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) shows a speeding violation, the applicant should be able to explain this. Intentionally lying on applications is never a good sign.

Reference and background checks

Check references to verify information given on the application and during the interview. Research indicates that past performance may be an indicator of future behavior, and it is one of the better resources available. One negative reference report should not be the single deciding factor in not hiring a candidate; however, if a trend emerges that indicates questionable behavior, further investigation is warranted. Request information pertinent to the applicant's past employment to help determine suitability for the job. For example, employment dates, type of work, equipment operated, accidents, and traffic violations, along with any disciplinary issues being verified as well.

The two most practical ways to conduct past employment reference checks is in writing or by telephone. Written reference checks are valuable as a permanent record and should be kept with the prospective associate's application and interview notes. Telephone reference checks are faster and often produce more candid information. A checklist will help ensure getting all the information needed and provides a simple written record for the files.

The application form should request the applicant's signature to authorize the checking of work references and MVR. Additional authorization forms may be required, if not incorporated into the application, where operations may include DOT regulated vehicles, and/or requires the driver to maintain a CDL.

Due to the strictness of today's fair hiring laws, many past employers are reluctant to divulge more than past employment verification information, i.e., dates of employment and salary. It is important to be consistent and persistent in trying to obtain information. Conducting due diligence to obtaining this information can help prevent hiring an employee that may be involved in a future crash.

Driver's License and Motor Vehicle Record Checks

Check the applicant's driver's license for expiration date, identification number, and vehicle classification. The license should be current, valid, and of the correct type for the position being filled.

An important reference to check is the accident and conviction records kept by state motor vehicle authorities. This is often referred to as a Motor Vehicle Record (MVR). Drivers with a history of accidents and moving traffic violations are likely to repeat that pattern. This review can give insight into the applicant's attitude toward traffic rules and regulations. The procedures for obtaining these records vary from state to state, as does the accuracy of the information. It is also important to check the records in other states where the applicant has held a driver's license. MVR information should be obtained prior to an associate operating a vehicle for company benefit, regardless of whether or not the vehicle is owned or non-owned.

Services are available that can promptly obtain this information electronically for a fee. Be sure to follow all appropriate procedures to obtain consent from the applicant before ordering such records.

Physical examinations

A physical examination is not a legal requirement except for drivers subject to FMCSA regulations – those driving commercial motor vehicles. However, many organizations that are not covered by FMCSA find it is a good business practice for any fleet operation. Properly administered, the examination provides reasonable assurance that the applicant is physically capable of performing the job. Consultation with your Human Resource Department regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act and the physical exam process is strongly encouraged. If the test is for a commercial vehicle driver, the examination should be performed by a physician experienced with FMCSA medical qualification guidelines (if applicable) or occupational specifics. When selecting a physician, discuss the purpose of the exam, and make your selection based on a physician who is willing to learn and understand your company's needs. A local hospital, medical or industry association may be able to offer suggestions for selecting a physician.

Written tests

Written tests on traffic regulations and general driving knowledge can be a valuable tool in employee selection. The test can include driving and non-driving questions. Although above average test results don't guarantee the applicant will be a good driver, they can certainly indicate a level of driver knowledge. For the applicant with no experience, these tests can be a good predictor of future performance. Tests must be geared to the actual job requirements. Be particularly conscious of the equal employment laws governing testing. Competency-based tests and assessments for commercial and noncommercial motor vehicle drivers are available from industry vendors, and address safe vehicle operations along with regulatory requirements, where applicable.

Road tests / Skills evaluations

Organizations today should have a written policy, and convey to candidates during the interview process, that a road test and skills evaluation will be administered to anyone who would be expected to drive, even if they are to drive only occasionally. Conduct the test in a vehicle similar to the one the applicant will drive. Where possible, the individual may be required to perform a few maneuvers in a parking lot before going on the road. Once on the road, follow a route similar to the one the applicant will drive if hired, and/or a pre-determined route of sufficient length and duration to yield an adequate skill assessment. The road test route should be a formal document that is discussed with the candidate prior to departure, which also serves to provide insight into the individual's capability to follow directions. Always use a standard scoring system to rate the driver to ensure consistency among all candidates.

In addition to evaluating driving skills, observe the applicant's attitude toward other vehicles encountered on the road. Also, check to see if the individual automatically puts on the seat belt, and makes any equipment adjustments prior to moving the vehicle. Remember, the applicant is most likely nervous and will probably drive with extra caution. However, these tests can give a good indication of the person's driving capabilities.

Probationary period

A probationary period should be a condition of employment that is stated in writing when a conditional offer of employment is conveyed to the applicant. The time frame should be long enough to obtain information from the motor vehicle authorities on traffic accident and conviction records, along with information requested through any previous employer inquiries. It must also permit enough time to conduct a detailed observation and appraisal of the associate's performance as compared with the job standards. A minimum of 30 days probation should be used unless labor agreements call for more or less time. It is also important to be reminded that certain requirements of the local, state or federal regulations may have a specific time period in which to be met, or the driver must be removed from any vehicle-related "safety-sensitive" functions.

Caution

Candidate selection procedures, from the application to the reference check, are governed by federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination in employment. It is possible to discriminate unknowingly if you are not fully aware of the requirements of these laws. Obtain guidance from your Human Resource specialists and/or legal counsel for all hiring activities.

Conclusion

For organizations who hire employees whose job description includes driving, thorough driver selection protocol should be followed. By following the above best management practices, your organization may have more success in selecting an employee that is qualified to performing driving tasks, and this may help reduce your organization's liability. Further information on this topic can be obtained by contacting your Zurich Risk Engineer.

References

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2. National Safety Council, 1121 Spring Lake Drive Itasca, IL 60143, Eleven elements to an effective motor fleet program.
3. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, Title 49 CFR Parts 380, 382 383, 390, 391, 392, and additional information available at www.fmcsa.dot.gov.
4. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations Medical Advisory Criteria, Guidance to Physicians, under Title 49 CFR, Part 391.41.
5. U.S. Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, SC 20530.
6. American National Standards Institute (ANSI) / American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) Z15.1-2012, Safety Practices for Motor Vehicle Operations, PP 1-48
7. U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA, Guidelines for Employers to Reduce Motor Vehicle Crashes http://www.osha.gov/Publications/motor_vehicle_guide.html
8. Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) and National Safety Council Fleet Safety Benchmarking Program.

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