

Paratransit passenger safety

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Paratransit or non-emergency medical transportation fleets service a wide range of customers and geographic locations. Many patients receiving outpatient medical services rely on community and privately funded companies for transportation.

Introduction

The most commonly used vehicles are vans, mini-buses, sprinters and specially equipped vehicles for wheelchair passengers. The most common types of loss arise from injuries to passengers caused by slips, trips or falls, especially wheelchair passengers and vehicle collisions.

One government-funded study of wheelchair users injured within a three-year period showed three recurring types of accidents contributing to passenger injuries:

- Using a lift
- Entering or exiting the motor vehicle
- Using a ramp

Researchers conducting another study concluded that the primary contributing factors causing passenger handling related injuries were:

- Unsafe vehicle maneuvering by the driver
- Inadequately designed wheelchair securement and other occupant restraint systems
- Ineffective training in the proper use of restraint systems

Preventing these types of injuries can be accomplished by implementing a fleet safety program with policies and procedures to address causes of loss.

Discussion

Management commitment and leadership– Management demonstrates their commitment to operating their commercial vehicle fleets safely. Company officials apply proven driving performance management and improvement measures to all employees engaged in driving company vehicles.

Employee hiring criteria and procedures– Driver Qualification standards and practices are reviewed on a regular basis to determine compliance with company policies and any applicable government laws or regulations. The driver selection criteria and hiring process may include, but are not limited to:

- Minimum age restriction of 23 years of age
- State driving history free of serious violations, no more than two moving violations or combination of one moving violation and one accident

- Application providing previous employment and experience driving a commercial vehicle for a minimum of two years
- Thorough background check including credit and criminal background check
- Develop a profile of critical values and skills needed to successfully and safely perform job duties and responsibilities. Conduct interviews to ensure applicants have compatible safety values, work ethic and
- interpersonal skills needed to interact with fellow employees and customers
- Confirmation of employment, duties and safety record with previous employers as far back in the past as possible
- Pre-employment physicals and controlled substances testing
- Conduct meaningful road test to evaluate skills to perform vehicle inspection, driving skills, knowledge of defensive driving techniques, operation of passenger entry/exit devices, especially lifts and restraint systems

Guidance

Performance evaluation process—Management enforces and adequately supervises employees to ensure drivers follow company policies and applicable laws and regulations. A process is in place to identify employees engaging in at risk driving behaviors and unsafe patient handling. Interventions are implemented to prevent further unsafe driving. Effective policies and procedures might include, but are not limited to:

- Initial evaluation of driving skills and knowledge during the hiring process. Management is required to address any identified deficiencies with training and coaching
- Ongoing performance evaluation process including annual review of state MVRs, accident involvement, scheduled and random observation rides and use of onboard recording devices to track driving behavior
- Use patient questionnaires to develop feedback for employees on customer perception of their performance
- Conduct scheduled and unscheduled observations of patient handling practices of employees

Employee safety training program— Safety training and education program should include, but are not limited to:

- Company safety and health policies and procedures
- Defensive driving training
- Passenger safe handling procedures, including specialized equipment including wheelchair lifts and ramps, patient care, personal responsibility and commitment to monitoring passenger compliance with all safety rules, especially seat belt and wheelchair restraints
- Emergency procedures for accidents or injuries
- Testing to ensure effectiveness of training programs
- Drug and alcohol testing

Maintenance inspection and repair procedures— The organization should have developed a comprehensive vehicle maintenance inspection and repair program including, but not limited to:

- Vehicle purchasing specifications meeting state and federal laws and additional safety features not necessarily mandated by law to prevent accidents and injuries
- Establish vehicle inspection intervals based on manufacturer's recommendations or more frequent if needed to operate safely for specialized vehicles and equipment i.e., securement devices, seat belts, lifts and ramps
- Written inspection and repair forms with procedures indicating acceptable or unacceptable vehicle safety component conditions including driver vehicle condition reports

Conclusion

Zurich Services Corporation Risk Engineering has created a detailed fleet safety program kit called 'Driving to Success' that you can use to help create your own program. If you would like a copy of this program, please contact your local risk engineering consultant.

References

1. "Injury to Wheelchair Users as a Result of Loading and Unloading from a Motor Vehicle" :, K. Ashley Torko, BS, Thomas Songer, PhD, Shirley Fitzgerald, PhD, Patricia Karg, MS, Department of Rehabilitation Science and Technology, University of Pittsburgh. January 1999.
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