



Improving Driver Safety with GPS Fleet Tracking Technology



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Monitoring Driving Habits from the Office

Whether you are a small business owner or a fleet manager for a larger organization, it's impossible to know the driving habits of your employees while you are in the office managing the day-to-day operations of your business. Often, you don't know that there are issues with your employees' driving habits until it's too late. It turns out that what you don't know can hurt you.

Were you aware that the most dangerous part of the day for any employee isn't the time spent operating machinery or servicing equipment? It's actually the time spent behind the wheel of a vehicle. In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of fatalities in the workplace – more than fires, explosions, trips, falls and equipment incidents combined. Additionally, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that commercial vehicles were involved in almost half of all fatal crashes in 2009.

While there are the obvious severe safety implications, dangerous driving affects your business as well. Do you really want your drivers distracted by a cell phone conversation? You have your business's name covering the side of your trucks. Moving advertisement? Yes. Moving complaint? Potentially. And while you may not have those "how's my driving?" stickers on your vehicles, most angry consumers will take the time to note a vehicle number or at the very least, your company name. Not exactly the impression you want to give to your community.

A GPS fleet tracking solution can help monitor your employees' driving habits while you are busy operating your business. You can track you drivers' speed, monitor aggressive driving behavior (such as hard braking or going around a turn too sharply), pinpoint repeat offenders and establish a safe driving policy within your company. In doing so, you can ensure you're compliant with the law, avoid heavy fines and some seriously bad PR for your business. Before we look at the issues involved with unsafe driving, let's first look at what's driving service businesses to find a solution.

Hang Up and Drive

A driver distracted by his cell phone is 23 times more likely to get in a crash, and the average cost of a fleet accident is \$25,000, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA). Besides the fact that aggressive and distracted driving is dangerous and can be expensive for your business, the Department of Transportation (DOT) has now weighed in on the matter of commercial driver safety. The FMCSA and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) have issued a ruling that restricts the use of hand-held cell phones by both interstate commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers and intrastate hazmat drivers.

This prohibits CMV drivers from holding, dialing or reaching for a hand-held cell phone, and includes all push-to-talk functions. Drivers will be subject up to \$2,750 in federal penalties for each offense. Companies that allow their drivers to use hand-held cell phones while operating a commercial motor vehicle face a maximum penalty of \$11,000 per violation.

Currently, 40 states ban text messaging while driving for all drivers and 10 states prohibit hand-held cell phone use while driving. In late 2009, the government prohibited federal employees from texting while driving government-provided cars. Two years later, commercial truck and bus operators were also banned from all hand-held cell phone use, except for emergency purposes.

Another serious issue related to unsafe driving in your fleet is increased liability. Again, an expensive problem if and when it arises. In a recent FLEETSolutions article, "Can a Strong Safety Policy Really Improve Driver Behavior," the author states, "Safe drivers not only prevent litigation costs and damage to an organization's brand, they can even go so far as to improve remarketing values."

The article goes on to say, "Telematics {GPS Fleet Tracking Solutions} can be a great tool to help monitor driver compliance. The use of telematics can provide information on speed, mileage, stop time, business and personal trips and mobile device usage." While implementing a driver safety program is recommended, how do you enforce your own standards with your employees? Let's take a closer look at the driver safety problems associated with running a fleet and how you can address them.

Unmonitored Excessive Speeding and Aggressive Driving

The NHTSA defines aggressive driving as occurring when "an individual commits a combination of moving traffic offenses so as to endanger other persons or property," and includes, but is not limited to, tailgating, weaving in and out of traffic, speeding, running stop signs or red lights and preventing others from passing. Aggressive driving actions were reported in 56% of fatal crashes from 2003 to 2007, with excessive speeding being the number one factor.

Excessive speeding leads to more tickets, accidents and potential liability against your company. According to Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, "Speeding - defined as exceeding the posted speed limit or driving too fast for conditions - is a factor in nearly one-third of all fatal crashes. Speed reduces the amount of available time needed to avoid a crash, increases the likelihood of crashing and increases the severity of a crash once it occurs." In fact, the NHTSA reports that nearly 1,000 deaths a month are attributed to speeding.

Excessive speeding is only one element of unsafe driving you can't monitor unless you are literally in the truck with your driver. The term "aggressive driving" has been used a lot to refer to larger metro areas where the speed limit is thought of as more of a recommendation than the actual law. Without a system in place to monitor your drivers' speed, there is often no way to take corrective action until it is too late. The ticket has been written, the accident has happened or a lawsuit has been filed. Even when you set down the rules, it's almost impossible to know if your employees are following a safe driving policy you have implemented.

Aggressive driving covers more than just speeding; it can involve barreling through that yellow light, following another vehicle too closely or even simply accelerating or stopping too quickly. While we all may have been guilty of this behavior before, it becomes an altogether different matter when that driver is in your company vehicle.

Think you or your field employees aren't guilty of aggressive driving? Think again. According to results from the 2008 AAA Foundation's Traffic Safety Culture Index, 78% of respondents rated aggressive drivers as a serious or extremely serious traffic problem, yet most of the same people reported driving in ways that could be classified as aggressive. In fact, three out of four drivers report that they believe that they are more careful than other drivers. The point? It is critical that all drivers, of both commercial and personal vehicles, honestly assess their own driving practices. For businesses with a fleet, this can be a particularly tricky thing to evaluate.

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Enforcing a driver safety program is easy to accomplish with the NexTraq Fleet Tracking solution. On the other hand, it's not just about eliminating unsafe driving habits, but making sure your drivers are safe as well. Your drivers can also be the accident victim of a non-commercial driver that has been speeding or driving aggressively. Without proper tools in place to protect your drivers, how do you fight an unfair citation or claim? It often becomes a "he said/she said" situation. Let's take a look at how a GPS fleet management solution can protect both your drivers and your business.

Using Fleet Tracking Technology to Improve Driver Safety

GPS fleet tracking is a widely-used management solution that allows fleet managers and dispatchers to track where their vehicles are throughout the day, as well as monitor driving habits. A driver safety system, typically used in tandem with GPS fleet tracking, allows users to screen vehicles for any sharp turns, hard braking, excessive speeding, etc.

Another system available is a distracted driving solution, which gives users the option to disable mobile devices, such as a cell phone or tablet, while a vehicle is in motion, allowing drivers to wholly concentrate on the task at hand. This also takes the pressure off the driver to respond to messages or phone calls immediately.

Implementing a GPS vehicle tracking solution can help you monitor driver behavior whether you are in the office or out in the field dealing with other issues. Tracking your vehicles at all times means that you can monitor your entire fleets' driving behavior, or a single vehicle. Once your employees know that it's visible when and how they break the rules, they are much less likely to push the envelope.

While most of your employees may fall in line once they know their speed can be monitored, there will always be the case of one lead foot within your workforce that simply won't comply. You now have concrete data to present to that employee, discuss a corrective action plan and address the issue proactively.

Additionally, a GPS vehicle tracking solution benefits your employees that do happen to get into an accident. If your employee is involved in an accident, you have exact latitude and longitude as well as speed data to turn a false claim into an open-and-shut case. This technology can actually minimize the expense to your drivers and your business.

These solutions can dramatically decrease the risk not only of a field employee causing an accident, but also decrease the costs associated with running a fleet. This ability to understand driving performance, identify at-risk drivers and implement driver coaching is leading some insurance carriers to offer lower rates to businesses with safety solutions, including GPS fleet tracking.

Now that we have looked at the benefits of a GPS fleet tracking solution for your business, let's look at how the NexTraq® Fleet Tracking solution can help you enforce a driver safety program and keep your drivers safe as well.

The NexTraq Fleet Tracking Solution and Driver Safety

Enforcing a driver safety program is easy to accomplish with the NexTraq Fleet Tracking solution. Our cloud-based, easy-to-use solution gives you the ability to monitor your employees' speeds and driving habits 24/7, whether you are in or out of the office. Our Alert functionality enables you to set up a Speed Alert for one vehicle or your entire fleet. When an employee has crossed your speeding threshold, you are immediately notified.

Additionally, our robust reporting offering gives you a comprehensive Driver Safety Scorecard Report that can be easily set up as a subscription to be emailed to you when standard operating procedure has been breached. The Driver Safety Scorecard Report shows a vehicle's driving infractions based on the time period you select, as well as who your best and worst drivers are. The report is based on information such as braking, acceleration, cornering and speeding.

NexTraq can even help you with the DOT ban on hand-held cell phones in commercial vehicles. NexTraq DriveGuard[™] is an award-winning distracted driving technology that blocks or restricts calls, emails, texting and web browsing while a vehicle is in motion. With almost 28% of all accidents caused by using mobile devices, the NexTraq DriveGuard solution is ideal for businesses looking to maintain company policies concerning cell phone or mobile device use in vehicles and ensure driver safety.

Lastly, NexTraq's Online Driver Education Courses, powered by I DRIVE SAFELY can help your business develop a comprehensive strategy to address driver education and driver safety issues. With a wide variety of self-paced online courses, NexTraq's Online Driver Education Courses are designed to improve driving skills, increase productivity and ensure that your fleet is operating at the safest level possible. Taking a proactive approach to driver safety will not only encourage responsible driving, it will help minimize incidents and reduce many traffic related expenses.

Need more great benefits? Many of our clients enjoy a significant insurance premium discount when they tell their insurance company that they can track their vehicles, trailers and equipment. Whether it's safe driving or recovering stolen assets, lowering your insurance premiums is a benefit that can significantly reduce your overhead costs.

Don't Just Take Our Word for It.

"We used to receive 60 to 70 emails a week on speed alerts resulting in disciplinary action. Now, we receive five or six emails a week." – Dion Calheta, Project Manager for Capeway Roofing Systems

"With the NexTraq solution, Acres Group received messages notifying them if an employee was speeding. After a couple of weeks, the speed alerts were reduced by 92%." – Jeff Dumas, Vice President of Acres Group North

For more information, please visit www.nextraq.com or call us at 800.358.6178 for a free consultation.

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