

UNTRAINED TRUCK DRIVERS COSTING THE ECONOMY BILLIONS

South Africa's roads are infamous for claiming many lives throughout the year with a notable increase over the festive season. The World Resources Institute has found that the country ranks 42nd in terms of road fatalities.

Arrive Alive figures suggest that 27.5% of accidents on our roads are caused by trucks and light delivery vehicles. Truck accidents accounted for 4.8%. Although relatively few in number, some truck accidents have made headlines because of the high number of fatalities when a large vehicle loses control.

The direct cost to the economy was recently estimated at R306 billion, which includes clearing accident scenes, hospital care and police time. There are also the indirect costs of work hours lost, delayed delivery and damaged cargos. This cost is materialising in higher vehicle insurance premiums charged by insurance companies.

Road freight remains the preferred method of transportation for many South African companies because in comparison to the rail industry, road transport still offers better availability, reliability and cost efficiency.

"Heavy vehicles are therefore integral to efficient supply chains. Without them, the supply chain would be compromised as goods would not reach their markets timeously. Improving the safety record of this vital industry is clearly important. In essence, having trucks on the road will always be beneficial to the country's economy. The large number of heavy vehicles on our roads makes it therefore imperative that measures are put in place to reduce the number of accidents involving trucks," says Arnoux Maré, Managing Director of Innovative Staffing Solutions. The company permanently employs over 7,500 employees, of which 5,500 are truck drivers who are outsourced to various transportation companies.

While no single approach can improve truck driver competency, there are solutions to reducing the number of accidents involving commercial vehicles. This includes a combination of regular driver evaluation and corrective training, fleet technology monitoring systems and close management of driver schedules to prevent fatigue and negligence.

"The safety of our employees and our clients' equipment is of the utmost importance to Innovative Staffing Solutions, which is why we constantly find new and innovative ways to improve driver competences. It is for this reason that our holding company, Innovative Solutions Group TM, recently invested in a Renault Kerax truck to conduct truck driver training for our own drivers and that of our clients. Our process allows us to train a driver every one and a half hours. Not only does our on-site dedicated truck benefit our clients by significantly reducing downtime for their trucks, but it ensures all drivers are properly trained in safety regulations and provided with measures to guarantee their own and others' safety on the roads," says Maré.

To further ensure the safety of employees and clients' equipment, Innovative Staffing Solutions man its control rooms 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. The company's dedicated controllers, who each oversee approximately 40 trucks and their drivers,

constantly provide feedback on driver behaviour and potential issues that could potentially affect operations.

Maré says it is important to provide clients with industry accident trends and to alert them about an escalation in accidents.

“We also provide on-site driver trainers who are skilled in the latest training methodologies to constantly instil the importance of safety regulations. These trainers accompany drivers on ad-hoc trips to observe their driving and to ensure that they conform to safety and road regulations.”

Driver fatigue is one of the greatest challenges faced by South African truck drivers. Many logistic firms struggle to fill their quota of drivers, which often forces managers to demand longer working hours from them, resulting in fatigue. It also means they cannot be taken off their shift for necessary refresher training.

“Fatigue affects truck driver competency in various ways, from slowed reaction times to lack of concentration. This is why we are so adamant that our drivers take regular breaks and get the necessary rest when they are on long trips. Our truck driver training therefore also includes the basics of safety regulations,” says Maré.

He concludes that less fatigue and fewer accidents will result in a decline in delays, increased productivity and an improved bottom line. These assist companies to improve their operating costs and enhance their reputation, among customers.