Case Study 11: Large Urban Area Toll Road Authority - Motorist Assistance Group

Keywords: Training / Program Design / Metrics / Hazardous Environments / Other Organizations

For this study, "other organizations" are defined as organizations that do not fit in the other three categories (Transit, Trucking and Safety Organizations). The definition included organizations employing other types of professional drivers, as well as employees who drive for their work, but who are not professional drivers. Examples from the "Other Organizations" category can be helpful for all organizations who have the freedom and/or the need to implement new and creative ideas. They may also be helpful for those organizations who are growing and want to think outside the "standard safe driving" box to customizable proactive safety programs.

This organization deploys 25-30 individuals a day in two shifts. Their role is to assist motorists on the toll way. Annual training is required and is supplemented with monthly safety meetings (safety awareness, theme based refresher presentations, etc.). The objective is to reduce incidents / crashes involving incident response staff. The general feeling is that the program does reduce incidents / crashes, but statistics are not kept and there is no formal program evaluation.

The program was developed in house in 2012 based on a perceived need related to problems observed, especially with new staff due to their unfamiliarity with the specialized vehicles they use (SUVs, light trucks, tow trucks and platform vehicle transporters, as well as the environment they operate in (incident response and management). There is an annual refresher training element as well as monthly safety meetings. There was no overt replication of a pre-existing program, thought the individuals involved in the development were experienced law enforcement officers and/or first responders. The training / program involves extensive (a full day) F2F contact by trained in-house trainers, a written element, a driving element and an array of pre-shift vehicle checks.

The elements / topics of the program are very specific to the duties of the incident response drivers. There is also a "Close Areas Maneuvers" element designed explicitly for incident responder situations (backing, braking, and cross traffic maneuvers). Also note especially the issue of dealing with road rage (i.e., operating in an environment where road rage is likely).

Regarding program evaluation metrics, performance is monitored at the individual level, but not linked back to training except in exceptional cases. The general feeling is that the program does reduce incidents / crashes, but statistics are not kept and there is no formal program evaluation.

Safety culture and courtesy associated with a highly visible public agency are covered along with basic defensive driving principals during the general 12 week new employee orientation.

Comments / Takeaways

- An example of close quarters maneuvering, but focused on first responders and their special circumstances and needs (i.e., backing up, cross traffic) where they are often/potentially the perpetrators of aberrant and unexpected actions.

- Scheduling and staff commitment are an ongoing challenge. Training and annual retraining take approximately half the staff off the road for a day. The monthly safety meeting similarly, but for less duration.

- The working conditions are inherently dangerous. This is acknowledged and addressed through targeted training and safety awareness. These programs are necessary and they work. Employee buy-in is critical.

- The incident response vehicles have cameras mounted outside the vehicle to monitor the situation near the vehicle, not to monitor driver behavior.