



Pursuing safety

Improvement requires a change in safety culture, which is done through hiring, training, technology, incentives, and rewards

By Rick Weber

IN 2004, Florida Rock & Tank Lines Inc decided to make some changes to its safety program.

Vice president of safety Jim Anderson and president Rob Sandlin thought they had a good program, but they were not satisfied with the results, so they decided to consult with an outside source—Bert Mayo, vice-president of risk control at the insurance brokerage that covers Florida Rock & Tank Lines.

Mayo went into about a third of the company's terminals to meet with drivers, dispatchers, managers, safety supervisors—virtually everyone at the operational level.

"We wanted an outside look to get a different perspective," Anderson said. "We learned a lot from that. We learned we had some disconnects between what the drivers thought about the dispatchers and what the

dispatchers thought about their managers. All this related to safety. We knew there was a lot of opportunity there to improve.

"We knew when we started into this that there would have to be some hard decisions made. We would probably have to make some changes in personnel along the way. But we set our expectations clearly on the direction we were going."

As a result, the company has been successful in reducing its accident-frequency ratios on a steady trend line, according to Anderson.

"Some of this requires that you take a look in the mirror and challenge yourself on what you're doing every day and what your level of commitment is to safe operations," he said. "No matter how long you're in the business, you continually have to challenge yourself to improve."

Anderson described some of the specific steps taken to upgrade the

tank truck carrier's safety performance during a presentation at the National Tank Truck Carriers Tank Truck Safety & Security Council Seminar held in June in New Orleans, Louisiana. Here's what Florida Rock & Tank Lines did:

- *Hiring.*

"Years back, all of our hiring was done in a decentralized manner. Every terminal placed its own ads and interviewed its own drivers. All that we did in safety was run MVRs (Motor Vehicle Reports) and send to them to terminal managers for their evaluation. We knew we couldn't do that any longer if we were going to improve, so we centralized all driver recruiting into the corporate office. Even with vetting drivers and making sure they met our qualifications in a standardized way across the board, the hiring decision is still the terminal manager's. We provided them qualified applicants to interview, but

ultimately they were charged with making the decisions. We knew we had to allow the manager to maintain that ownership with drivers, so that they wouldn't say, 'Oh, that's who corporate recruiting sent me to work here.' "

- *Training.*

"After you hire them, how do you train them? We weren't efficient, nor were we standardized. We formed three venues where we'd do three-day driver training classrooms for all drivers within the first 90 days. We did it in Tampa and Jacksonville (Florida), and Atlanta (Georgia) each month. We sat down and took the components of HM-126, but also added in defensive driving, loading/unloading procedures, and emergency response. Each year, we go through the agenda to see if it still makes sense. You have to continually update training information. As new training tools and defensive driving programs come about, you may say, 'This one's been good for us, but this one is better.' "

- *Certified driver training program.*

"We asked the terminal managers, 'Who would you like to be a driver trainer?' Previous to that, it was just who the terminal manager thought that day would be the trainer. It was a warm body: 'Hey, ride with Joe today.' That was the trainer."

- *Roll Stability Control (RSC).*

"In 2004, I went out to an Ohio test-track facility to look at roll stability control. I came away from that amazed: 'This is the greatest thing I've seen ever.' We were struggling with rollovers. I went back and asked Rob, 'When can we get this technology on new orders on all of our new tractors? This needs to be a standard component for our specs.' "

- *Critical Event Reporting.*

"In 2006, we started equipping fleets with Qualcomm's Critical Event Reporting. I loved it. As good as roll stability was in preventing rollovers, getting data was difficult. To have real-time notification when a roll-stability event occurred, to have that timely intervention with the driver to review that information, was a great technology evolution. When you can show the driver the maps with a red

X on the ramp where he was going 32 mph, that driver has to take some ownership. To be able to have factual data to coach drivers, we've been able to change behaviors with that. Unfortunately along the way, we've lost drivers to roll-stability events. They were just hardheaded: 'I've been driving trucks for 32 years and never had a rollover.' I said, 'You're right. You've been very fortunate. But if you keep going down the path you're on, one slip and you're going to have that rollover. If you can't change your ways, we don't have a place for you.' "

- *Electronic On-board Recorders (EOBRs) and e-logs.*

"We started three years ago. There were all these preconceived notions about losing efficiency and revenues, and it will be like Big Brother watching over them. We quickly found that when we did parallel testing, they quickly saw the value and how much easier it made their day. By the end of this summer, we were 100% on e-logs. From a compliance side, everybody who has worked with these systems knows how much easier it is for us as safety professionals to know for sure that we're operating in compliance with the regulations."

- *Incentive program for drivers between safety bonuses and awards.*

"We didn't make any real changes, but we did start to set goals at every terminal on accident-frequency ratios, product-mixture ratios, and lost time to injuries. With that, we included a bonus opportunity for all management personnel. It is a significant part of our bonus. We put our money where our mouth is. We wanted to reward those who were meeting their goals. We rolled that out in 2005."

- *Prizes.*

"For our drivers, we thought we needed to shake things up and come up with something new to get their attention. We decided we would give away a new Chevrolet Silverado every year. With 600 drivers in our fleet, the requirement was that they had to be employed for an entire fiscal year and operate without any preventable incidents. The other part was that the terminal had to meet its preventable-accident frequency goal,

so you have individual responsibility with team peer pressure built in. I heard drivers remind each other, 'Hey, slow down today because it's raining.' Each month, we provide an updated list of drivers in the running for the truck. It's been a great incentive for us."

- *State trucking associations.*

"We started a program in conjunction with the Florida Trucking Association: No Zone. We have two of our trailers that are wrapped in a No-Zone graphic decal. We take them to area high schools and have No-Zone events that educate young drivers about the dangers of being in the blind spot of large trucks. It isn't just about what we can do internally. It's about reaching out to promote trucking safety."

- *Focusing on the safety group itself.*

"In the years I've spent in the operations of the company, the relationship between the operations group and safety group wasn't always the best. That was something I recognized when I came into full-time safety responsibilities. We really have shifted our focus from being more of an enforcement-compliance mindset to looking at, 'How can we help these drivers succeed in their jobs? How can we help our operations management succeed in reaching their goals?' We're working with drivers where we ride with them, when they're loading and unloading. We want to get to the point where they don't look at us as an adversary but somebody there to help them do a better job. I'd like to tell you we're 100% there with that. We're not, but we're a lot closer than we were. Your work as a safety professional is never done." ■