

## Road safety – a work-environment issue

*Roads and streets form part of the workplace of many employees. Besides professional drivers, these include home-help and home-nursing personnel, security staff and salespersons.*

About fifty employees die at work every year. One-fifth of all fatal accidents in Sweden occur on the roads. Driving as part of one's job is a work-environment issue. The employer also bears the responsibility for minimising the risks of ill health and accidents in that part of the work environment involving vehicles. This is the case regardless of whether employees drive a vehicle belonging to their company or organisation, whether they use their own car for business travel or whether they ride a bicycle.

The aim of this brochure is to provide help and guidance in treating questions of road safety as part of systematic activities on behalf of the work environment. It is based on, among other things, AFS 2001:1 (Provisions on systematic work-environment management) which transpose Council Directive 89/391/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work.

The brochure describes how employers can organise work so as to avoid risks of ill health and accidents on the roads. It also contains examples of questions that may need to be discussed by employers as part of their road safety activities and of what form a road safety policy as part of their work environment policy can take.

### **Facts**

- About 500 persons die each year in road accidents.
- 20% of them die in collisions with heavy goods vehicles.
- 50% of car drivers who are fatally injured were not wearing a seat belt. Half of them would have survived if they had been wearing one.
- Only 30% of drivers of heavy goods vehicles wear a seat belt.
- Defective brakes are one of the most common findings in the annual vehicle inspection.
- More than 14,000 persons drive each day under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Source: Swedish National Road Administration

## **The costs of road accidents are measured in suffering and money**

An employee who is injured in a road accident often faces considerable suffering of both a psychological and a physical kind. Moreover, the accident also means large costs for employers and for society.

Some of the factors that come into play have been shown to be stress, poor vehicle maintenance, excess or inadequately secured loads, long working hours without rest and time margins that are too tight.

## **What is road safety?**

The term road safety can mean many things; however, it is basically about knowledge and attitudes. It also takes in drivers who are in no way fatigued or under the influence of alcohol or drugs and who drive crashworthy and well-maintained vehicles with adequate tyres. It is also about wearing one's seat belt, driving in accordance with the law and adapting one's speed to existing conditions.

## **The employer's responsibility**

All employers must engage in systematic work-environment management, one of the outcomes of which may be a road safety policy. This policy should describe what working conditions should apply to prevent ill health and accidents. Since road safety is a matter of the work environment, it should be treated as such. This means that employers, in their existing work environment policy or in a separate road safety policy, need to make clear how work must be organised in order to achieve the best possible degree of road safety.

It is also the responsibility of the employer to ensure that all employees are aware of the policy and its aims. Anyone who has taken note of the policy has in turn a responsibility for observing it in their day-to-day work.

In order for the employees to act in a safe manner, it is important for them to have motivation and knowledge. The policy must therefore be clear and easy to understand.

## **How to go about things:**

### **1. Survey the working conditions**

- How many employees drive as part of their job?
- Do they keep to the speed limits?
- Do they all wear a seat belt?
- Are they all sober and free of drugs when they drive on business?
- Are they alert and refreshed?
- Have they had adequate training?
- What types of vehicle do they use?
- Are the right vehicles used for the task in hand?
- Do any of them use their own car for their work?
- Do we take account of road safety aspects when purchasing vehicles?
- Is the work planned so that the employees have sufficient time for their duties and are not under stress when driving?

- What road safety risks are involved in the total distance travelled for business purposes?
- Have any accidents or serious incidents occurred?

These are some of the questions that serve as the starting point for the work to be carried out. By surveying the existing state of affairs, the employer and the employees obtain a good picture of the normal operation of the workplace. The survey forms a basis for assessing what risks of accidents or ill health exist.

The conditions of work need to be surveyed regularly, and this is the responsibility of the employer. It is a good idea, therefore, at this stage to draw up procedures which give information about when, how and by whom the surveys are to be carried out.

## **2. Risk assessment**

Once the survey of the existing state of affairs is complete, it is time to assess the risks that have emerged. They also need to be documented. You may find the following questions of help:

- Imagine that one of your employees has had an accident. What repercussions can this have in the form of long-term sick leave, human suffering, a fatality etc?
- How many persons are exposed to risks on the roads?
- How often and for how long are the employees out on the roads?
- When are the risks at their highest (stress, poor visibility, winter road conditions etc.)?

If no one in the business is qualified to assess the risks, use should be made of the occupational health service or comparable expert assistance from outside.

## **3. Road safety policy**

The risks present in the business are an important starting point when drawing up the policy on road safety. The policy should, of course, clearly set out the employer's intentions when it comes to minimising risks. It is therefore important for the employer, together with the employees, to review operations and to assess potential risks before the policy is framed.

### **What form a road safety policy can take**

An example is given below of how a road safety policy can be formulated. Although not all the items are relevant for every employer, they illustrate things that individual employers can think about and decide upon when drawing up their policy.

Each company strives to minimise the risk of any of its employees suffering ill health or an accident. This includes road safety. We have therefore laid down the following road safety policy:

### **The company regularly monitors**

- whether the employees keep to the speed limits, wear a seat belt, drive when sober and free of drugs and are alert and thoroughly refreshed,
- operations and lists and identifies the risks to which employees are exposed when travelling in their work. All risks are assessed according to their severity.
- the road safety policy and updates it as required.

### **Our employees should**

- always observe the existing speed limits and traffic rules in general,
- always wear a seat belt, regardless of the type of vehicle (e.g. car/bus/lorry) driven,
- always keep to our alcohol and drug policy, i.e. be sober and free of drugs at all times when working,
- always be alert and refreshed when driving in their work,
- possess the competence and health required to enable them to drive safely in their work,
- undergo additional monitoring of those aspects of health that affect road safety when they have their annual medical check-up,
- receive training in securing loads every two years, if they drive heavy goods vehicles with a gross weight of more than 3.5 tonnes,
- always wear a helmet when riding a bicycle in their work.

### **Our vehicles**

#### *Private cars have:*

- seat-belt warning devices which, for example, emit a loud noise if the belt is not worn when the engine is running,
- a kerb weight (including the driver) of between 1,000 and 1,800 kg,
- a three-point seat belt for every seat,
- airbags and seat belt tensioners for the passenger as well as the driver, air conditioning.

#### *Light trucks and heavy goods vehicles have:*

- seat-belt warning devices which, for example, emit a loud noise if the belt is not worn when the engine is running,
- air conditioning (on buses, at least for the driver),
- an alcohol lock,
- ABS brakes,
- airbags and seat belt tensioners for the passenger as well as the driver.

### **Planning**

- We always plan our journeys so as to comply with existing legislation. We also take account of other factors that affect scheduling and the choice of route, such as driving breaks, traffic problems, driving in poor visibility, and bad weather.
- We never perform assignments in a manner which may cause us not to comply with existing legislation and our policy.

### **Transport using one's own car for work purposes**

- In order to use one's own vehicle at work, it must satisfy all the points under the heading "Private cars have" above.

## Hire cars

- The cars we hire satisfy all the points under the heading “Private cars have” above.

### 4. Measures and action plan

As a result of the survey of the existing state of affairs and the risk assessment, the employer and the employees can see where the risks lie and what improvements are needed. Where things can be put right, measures are taken. Other measures laid down in the action plan should be clear, easy to understand, capable of being measured and scheduled for a particular time.

The action plan specifies what must be done, who is responsible for it being done and when it should be done by.

### 5. Follow-up

In order to find out whether the measures have turned out as the employer intended, they need to be monitored. At least once a year a follow-up also takes place of all environmental activities. It is important for the employees to be involved in the follow-up, thereby creating a sense of commitment and participation. Here are some points that should be included in the annual follow-up:

- *Has everything been put right?*
- *Do the company and the employees carry out the policy?*
- *Did the policy and the measures produce the desired results?*
- *Have there been any incidents or accidents?*
- *Are we following the set targets?*
- *What support and monitoring systems are needed to enable the employees to carry out the policy?*
- *Are any changes needed in the risk assessment we perform?*
- *Are any changes needed in the road safety policy?*
- *Are the employees following the procedures and participating actively in the road safety work?*

The follow-up can be carried out in various ways. Carrying out checks of tachograph records, driving logs, route planning and the reporting of incidents and accidents are just a few examples of what needs to be reviewed by employers in order to monitor their business. The follow-up also serves as a basis for the task of finding continual improvements.

## Getting systematic work-environment management under way

This is what needs to be done in order to get a functioning systematic work-environment management under way:

- *Get hold of the provisions on systematic work-environment management, AFS 2001:1.*
- *Survey the work environment together with the employees.*
- *Assess the risks. If possible, take corrective action immediately.*
- *Draw up an action plan for what cannot be put right immediately.*
- *Formulate a work environment policy.*

- *Perform a follow-up.*
- *Investigate accidents, illnesses and serious incidents.*

## **Notifying road accidents to the Work Environment Authority**

*The employer has an obligation to investigate cases where an employee has suffered ill health or an accident at work and also where a serious incident has occurred.*

The employee must inform the Work Environment Authority if:

- an accident or other harmful event at work has resulted in a death,
- an accident or other harmful event at work has resulted in a serious injury,
- an accident or other harmful event at work has affected several employees,
- an incident at work has involved a serious danger or ill health.

Notification shall take place immediately, preferably by telephone, to the district in which the place of work is situated.

Accidents occurring in the course of travel to and from work only need to be reported to the Social Insurance Agency, although in the case of accidents and incidents during business travel, e.g. deliveries, customer visits or travel between places of work, an obligation also exists to inform the Work Environment Authority. Notification must take place, for example, of accidents which involve only damage, without personal injury. Road accidents involving injuries must also be notified. It is also advisable to bear in mind that an incident on the road may have posed a serious danger to life and health, even if no one was injured or only one person suffered mild injuries.

## **Incidents**

When an accident occurs, several incidents will usually have taken place. The same underlying factors and a similar sequence of events are frequently involved.

To prevent accidents, it is important to make the most of knowledge of the incidents that have occurred. All employees who are involved in an incident should report it to their employer, even if they feel it was caused by clumsiness on their part or if they think they were at fault.

Employers need to inform their employees why the reporting of incidents is so important, and that the aim is not to criticise or identify a particular individual, but to discover risks that may result in injury.

In order to be informed about incidents, the employer needs to have a reporting system, which should be designed to make it easy for the employees to use and easy for the employer to compile data. A complicated system may have the effect that incidents are not reported, making it difficult to avoid the risks of accidents happening.

More information about the Work Environment Authority can be found on [www.av.se](http://www.av.se).