



WHEN AN INCIDENT HAPPENS: COLLISION REPORTING, INVESTIGATION AND REVIEW

For your driver safety management program to succeed, you need to understand that collisions are not only relevant to your insurer. Preventing collisions—and ensuring your drivers understand their accountability—reduces both your business and insurance costs, and promotes road safety.

Of course, when you manage any fleet, regardless of size or type, you hope that your drivers are trained well enough to avoid becoming involved in a collision. Teaching drivers to drive defensively will help prevent collisions that occur because of the mistakes of others, as well as accidents caused by adverse conditions (e.g., weather, traffic, lighting, the condition of the vehicle or road, or the driver's physical or mental state).

But there is no fail-safe way to prevent all collisions. That's why fleet managers need to set up formal, standardized procedures for reporting, investigating and reviewing every collision that occurs. This way, you can identify the cause of the collision and take steps to prevent it from happening again.

**WHEN SHOULD
A COLLISION BE
INVESTIGATED?**

All collisions that involve company vehicles should be investigated in a timely manner. Be sure to interview the driver or witnesses before they forget any details, and to inspect the incident location before the situation changes. To enable a prompt response, you need to have a clear procedure in place for drivers to report incidents.

**WHO
INVESTIGATES
A COLLISION?**

First-line supervisors should be fully involved in the investigation of any incident in their area, even if the investigation is coordinated by a senior manager or safety specialist.

**HOW SHOULD
AN INVESTIGATION
BE CARRIED OUT?**

The purpose of an investigation is to assess and agree with the driver the extent to which the collision was preventable and how it may have been avoided. An investigation should not be done in a retaliatory manner and should never seek to blame anyone.

If driver error is believed to be a significant cause of the incident, the reason for the error should be further investigated. Lack of knowledge or training, or unsuitability for the job, may be part of the problem. However, these are management—not driver—shortcomings. Only when these possibilities have been considered, together with the possibility of genuine mistakes, can we consider wilful and intentional acts or omissions as the cause.

The scope of the investigation will vary according to the circumstances, but should include:

- the chain of events leading to the collision
- the cause(s) of the collision
- recommended actions to prevent a recurrence.

The assessor should be trained to complete the investigation with particular reference to the actions that the driver could have taken to avoid the collision. Interviews can also reveal circumstances that contributed to the collision that would not have otherwise been identified from a report or claim form.

**HOW SHOULD
AN INVESTIGATION
BE CARRIED OUT?**

Continued

Remedial driving programs should be designed and customized to address problem areas and help drivers improve. Remedial training can also help improve substandard performance. The need for remedial training may be identified by:

- customer complaints
- complaints from the public
- moving traffic violations
- reports of vehicle misuse or abuse
- involvement in preventable collisions.

**PREVENTABLE
COLLISIONS**

The following examples can help you determine the types of collisions that may be preventable.

Intersections

At any intersection, drivers must be prepared to avoid a collision that could occur as a result of the actions—or inactions—of other drivers. Complex traffic movement, blind intersections or failure of the other driver to conform to law or traffic-control devices will not automatically determine a collision to be unpreventable. Intersection collisions may be preventable even when the driver has not violated any traffic regulations.

When a driver crosses an intersection and the obvious actions of the other driver indicate possible involvement (e.g., excessive speed, crossing the lane while turning or approaching from behind a blind spot), the resulting collision should be considered preventable.

Vehicle ahead

A driver can prevent a collision—even if a vehicle ahead stops abruptly or unexpectedly—by maintaining a safe following distance at all times. Always be prepared for possible obstructions on the highway, either in plain view or hidden by the crest of a hill or the curve of a roadway. Overdriving headlights at night is a common cause of this type of collision. Night speed should be kept at a level that will permit the vehicle to come to a stop within the distance illuminated by the vehicle's headlights.

Vehicle behind

Investigation often reveals that drivers risk being struck from behind by failing to maintain a margin of safety in their own following distance. Collisions involving the rear of the vehicle that are preceded by a roll back, an abrupt stop at a grade crossing or a traffic-signal change, or another driver failing to signal a turn at an intersection, should be considered preventable. Failure to slow down gradually should also result in the collision being considered preventable.

**PREVENTABLE
COLLISIONS**

Continued

Passing

Unsafely passing another vehicle indicates faulty judgment and possible failure of the driver to consider one or more important factors before attempting the manoeuvre. Unusual actions of the driver being passed or of oncoming traffic might appear to exonerate a driver involved in a passing collision; however, the entire passing manoeuvre is voluntary and therefore the driver's responsibility.

Being passed

Collisions from sideswipes and cut-offs, involving a driver being passed, are preventable if the driver fails to yield to the passing vehicle by slowing down or moving to the right where possible.

Oncoming

It is extremely important to check the action of a driver involved in a head-on or sideswipe collision with a vehicle approaching from the opposite direction. The exact location of vehicles prior to and at the point of impact must be carefully verified. Even if an opposing vehicle enters a driver's traffic lane, it may be possible for the driver to avoid the collision by slowing down, stopping or moving to the right. Failure to signal the opposing driver (by flashing the headlights or sounding the horn) should also be taken into account.

Fixed objects

Collisions with fixed objects are preventable. They usually involve failure to check or properly judge clearances. New routes, strange delivery points, resurfaced pavements under viaducts, inclined entrances to docks, marquees projecting over a travelled section of road and other similar situations are not valid reasons for excusing a driver's involvement in the collision. Drivers should be constantly on the lookout for such conditions and make the necessary allowances.

Pedestrians and cyclists

Traffic regulations and court decisions generally favour the pedestrian hit by a moving vehicle. An unusual circumstance—such as a pedestrian emerging from between parked vehicles—does not necessarily excuse a driver from taking precautions to prevent a collision. Reduced speeds are required in school zones, shopping areas, residential streets and other areas with increased pedestrian traffic. The driver who fails to reduce speed when bicycles, motor scooters and similar types of equipment are operated within sight distance has failed to take the necessary precautions to prevent a collision. Keeping within posted speed limits does not qualify as taking the proper precaution when unusual conditions call for voluntary reduction of speed.

PREVENTABLE COLLISIONS

Continued

Private property

When a driver is expected to make deliveries at unusual locations (e.g., construction sites) or on driveways not built to support the weight of the vehicle, it is the driver's responsibility to discuss the operation with the proper authorities and to obtain permission prior to entering the area.

Non-collision

Many non-collision incidents, including overturning, jackknifing and running off the road, may result from emergency actions by the driver to avoid being involved in a collision. Examination of events leading to the incident may reveal that the vehicle was moving too fast for the conditions, or other factors. The driver's actions prior to the incident should be examined for possible errors or lack of defensive driving.

Miscellaneous

Injury to persons or damage to the vehicle, cargo or other property caused by loose objects falling from the vehicle, loose tarpaulins or chains, or doors swinging open may be considered preventable if the driver's actions (or failure to act) are evidenced. Cargo damage that results from unsafe vehicle operation should be considered preventable.

Parking

Unconventional parking locations, including double parking and failure to put out warning devices, generally constitute evidence for a preventable collision. Roll-away collisions from a parked position normally should be classified preventable. A properly parked vehicle should be locked with the engine off, parking brake set, manual transmission in lowest gear, multi-speed axle in low range and wheels blocked or turned toward a curb to prevent vehicle movement. Note: A driver should not use the trailer hand valve or set the emergency braking control to hold a parked vehicle.

Backing

Most backing collisions are preventable. A driver is still responsible for backing safely when a signaller is involved in the manoeuvre, since a signaller cannot control the movement of the vehicle. A driver must verify all clearances.

Keep drivers safe—and insurance costs down. RSA's Driver Safety Management Package can help you acquire, develop and retain the right drivers.

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