

# Building Strong Road Safety Policies



Strong and effective road safety policies are key elements of a successful road safety program. This document outlines a step-by-step framework you can use to build policies that work for your organization. It explains common policy components and identifies questions employers should answer as they develop their road safety policies.

## What is a safety policy?

A safety policy is a written statement of the principles and strategies an organization uses to guide its decisions in order to achieve its safety objectives. Often, it states the organization's commitment to worker safety and identifies the roles and responsibilities of the employer, supervisors and workers.

**Example policy statement:** *XYZ Inc is committed to employee safety. In order to protect our employees, other drivers, pedestrians and cyclists, XYZ Inc requires that when any of our employees are driving in the course of their work, they shall not engage in activities that distract their focus from driving responsibilities.*

## Getting started

### 1. Assemble a small team

Collectively, the people building policies must have a solid understanding of the regulatory requirements, company protocols, subject matter, and what implementing the policy will mean for the people who have to apply it. Since it is difficult to find that breadth of knowledge in one person, a team approach often works best.

Such a team should include:

- A company management representative such as a manager or owner who knows company protocols and the objectives the company wants to achieve by the policy,
- A subject matter expert who is familiar with the hazards and risks the policy intends to address; perhaps an experienced company driver or external road safety specialist, and
- A member of the joint occupational health and safety committee or a worker safety representative.

Knowledge and expertise vary among individuals, so it is beneficial to engage different team members for different road safety topics.

### 2. Provide sufficient resources

Make sure the team has the resources it needs to be successful. Members need time to research, meet and discuss key issues, determine the strategy and steps the organization will take, and draft the policy that explains them. Managers and supervisors need to acknowledge the value of developing a solid process and support the team to do that.

### 3. Consult employees

To build workable policies, the people who drive vehicles in the course of their work must be involved. They know the hazards they face and likely have good ideas about how to avoid the hazards and minimize risks. Ask the team to speak with several drivers to get their views on current practices that are effective, and hear their suggestions for actions they can take to address the hazards they face when driving.

### 4. Key questions policies should answer

i. **Why** is the organization building this policy?

Include a brief summary that states the organization's objectives for the policy. Explain what the company intends to accomplish through implementing the policy. Such objectives might include:

- Safeguard the health and safety of employees, other drivers, cyclists and pedestrians.
- Demonstrate the organization's duty of care.
- Comply with legal requirements and due diligence obligations.
- Reduce the human and financial costs associated with motor vehicle crashes.
- Protect the company's business reputation.

ii. **What** strategy will the organization apply to achieve its objectives?

Describe the approach the organization will use to avoid hazards and manage associated risks and consequences. Broadly state what the policy requires employees to do, for example, "not engage in activities that distract their focus from driving responsibilities" as in the above example policy statement.

iii. **Who** is expected to apply the policy?

Road safety policies should apply to *all* employees who drive. However, there may be specific procedures that apply to certain driving circumstances, or individuals that are exempt from some requirements. Consider the following questions.

- Will the policy apply to contractors or sub-contractors? What about volunteers, interns, part-time staff or seasonal workers?
- Are specific roles (e.g., emergency responder) or individuals with special qualifications exempt from parts of the policy?
- Are there special requirements or limitations for new or young workers?

iv. **When** does the policy apply?

For ease and consistency of implementation, the best policies apply all of the time. However, there may be circumstances when a policy does not apply. Perhaps travel check-ins are optional for cross-town trips in summer, but mandatory for all winter travel. Perhaps weekly vehicle inspections can replace daily inspections provided accumulated trips do not exceed 200 km. If such limitations or exceptions apply, clarify them.

#### TIP

*Avoid or minimize special conditions, unique applications or exemptions. They tend to generate a lengthy document, and make application and enforcement difficult.*

v. **Where** does the policy apply?

Think about all of the locations where employees drive during the course of their work. Most policies would apply on public and private roadways as well as sites and locations owned or controlled by your organization. What about other jurisdictions with different legal requirements, or sites or locations controlled by customers, clients or prime contractors?

vi. Are there **consequences** for failing to comply with the policy?

Managers, supervisors and employees appreciate having rules and consequences explained up-front. If the organization does not already have a disciplinary process, the policy should explain the mechanism management will apply to those who do not follow the policy. Serious contraventions such as driving while impaired by alcohol or drugs require immediate attention. Progressive discipline may be suitable for other infractions.

**TIP**

*It's not possible or necessary to prescribe measures to address every possible non-compliance your employees might encounter. Explaining corrective measures associated with the most serious and most common contraventions provides a reasonable understanding of measures appropriate for other circumstances.*

## 5. Building your policy document

There is no single "correct" recipe for building safety policy documents. Some organizations separate policy items from safe work procedures to create two distinct documents. Others find it effective to combine policies and procedures. Below are suggestions to help you decide what's right for you.

If your organization already has a method for building effective safety policies, it makes sense to use it. Similarly, rather than "re-inventing the wheel", review existing [example policies](#) and adapt them to suit your circumstances.

If policy statements require complex or lengthy procedural explanations, or your organization has many employees with a variety of classifications, vehicles and driving duties that will require a few different procedures or sets of instructions, consider separating policy and safe work procedure documents. If you use this approach, cross-reference the documents and attach procedures to the related policy.

### What is a procedure?

A **procedure** explains practices that are consistent with policy principles and strategies, but provides specific "how to" details of the steps employees must follow and the actions they will take as a means to achieve policy objectives.

**Example procedure:** *While driving for company business, XYZ Inc employees will not use either a hand-held or a hands-free device. They will not make or take calls, emails or texts when behind the wheel. If employees have to make or take a call, they will pull over when it is safe to do so.*

Combining policies with their associated safe work procedures is efficient. It enables employees to see what they are required to do alongside the rationale for doing so. Because you periodically improve your road safety policies, it is easier to review and update one combined document. And, if you want employees to read, understand and apply the procedures, a solid one-pager has clear advantages.

If you choose to combine a policy with its procedures, the document will include specific instructions (e.g., supervisors will review each employee's driver abstract at the time of hire, and annually thereafter), and/or results-based guidance (e.g., employees using their own vehicle for company business will maintain their vehicle in good repair consistent with manufacturer's recommendations).

Whatever approach you select, use familiar terms and straight forward language so that managers, supervisors and drivers read the document and quickly understand it. Use bullets or numbers to highlight key points. Adopt a standard format so employees grow accustomed to seeing information presented the same way each time.

## TIP

*If you have limited time and resources to develop and implement safety measures, you will do more to advance safety if you take two hours to draft a one-page policy and six hours explaining it to your drivers and helping them implement it, than spending seven hours drafting a fancy policy but only one hour delivering it to the crew.*

## 6. Review, feedback and endorsement

Once the draft document is built, it's time for others to review and endorse it. Some management teams reserve the right to review the draft before sharing it with employees. Many organizations choose to have management, supervisors and drivers meet to discuss the document. During the meeting, reviewers consider the following questions.

- Do I understand what I have to do?
- Are the measures practical? Can drivers meet these expectations? Will they?
- Will implementing the policy and its procedures achieve our goals?

These meetings generate discussion, tough questions and suggestions to improve the draft policy. It's also a great way to introduce the process to employees and gain their support.

Once the team makes any necessary revisions, senior management should sign the policy. A worker representative or an occupational health and safety committee member should also sign the document.

## 7. Communication

No policy can be effective until it is communicated to employees and they know what they need to do. Try a combination of methods to communicate information.

- Have a supervisor sit down and review the policy with each employee, discuss points important to that driver and answer their questions. Use a brief quiz to verify they understand their role.
- Have supervisors lead tailgate talks to discuss the policy (and procedures).
- Post the policy on the company intranet so employees can review it when they like. Display it on the bulletin board. Keep a copy of the safety plan where all employees have ready access to it.
- Place simple stickers on or in vehicles to remind drivers of key messages.
- Reinforce understanding with an annual "refresher" review and quiz at a safety meeting.
- Nothing communicates commitment better than a solid, consistent example by managers, supervisors and safety champions within the company.

## TIP

*Recognize good performance. A sincere "thank you" plus a pat on the back tells staff that you see and appreciate their efforts and the results.*

## 8. Continual improvement

As your business evolves, so do your employees' driving circumstances. They take new routes to new customers. You purchase vehicles with different equipment, technology and features. You hire new employees. The hazards your drivers encounter and the solutions available to address them change.

Because crashes can hurt your people and your business, review road safety policies at least annually. Look at them with a fresh set of eyes. Engage drivers in the conversation. Are you seeing the results you expected? Are objectives being met? What's working? What's not working? Make the necessary improvements, and communicate them.