

## ORIENTATION BASICS

For newly hired drivers, orientation is the first step in the driver training process. Because this is often a new employee's first real contact with a company, its importance cannot be overstated. A good initial contact between drivers and management can help form the foundation of a relationship that influences many aspects of the drivers' employment, including their level of commitment to the company, how productive they are and their safety on the road.

An orientation program is important to help drivers become familiar with a company's operations before they begin driving. New drivers who understand how a company operates, its routes and customers, are more likely to be safe and productive during the first weeks and months on the job. Time spent reviewing equipment features and operating procedures can help reduce equipment wear and tear. These efforts can help new drivers get off to a good start, reduce the likelihood of an accident, and help foster a positive working relationship with management.

A successful orientation program should review, at minimum, the following key areas. Compiling written information relating to these subjects can be a helpful orientation guide for new drivers.

**Company procedures:** Company policies and procedures set standards for driver conduct and performance in many different areas, including daily job responsibilities, steps to take in emergency situations, customer service, and vehicle care and maintenance. Failing to outline policies and procedures during orientation sets the stage for misunderstandings that can jeopardize the employer-employee relationship. Not adequately explaining important policies and procedures designed to ensure a safe work environment can lead to accidents and safety violations.

**Personnel policies:** The pay scale and method of payment should be explained, along with benefits, company policies relating to holidays and vacations, advances, etc. Describe how the driver can benefit from working for your company. How does pay, benefits, or routes improve as they gain seniority? Explain the process for performance reviews and give the driver an idea of what to expect.

**Operations:** A common reason some drivers become dissatisfied is not being assigned the type of work, schedule or routes they expected. Take time to discuss important job responsibilities and expectations. Some key questions to address are: In what areas will the driver be operating? What types of cargo will the driver be transporting? Are there requirements to handle cargo? If overnight trips are required, how often will he or she return home? What are the company's procedures for assigning equipment, routes, and loads?

**Communications:** Describe how and when the driver should contact dispatch. If satellite tracking and communication systems are used, provide instruction on how to use these devices effectively and whether they can be used for personal communications. Explain what the driver should do in emergency situations, such as an accident. Provide after-hours and emergency contact information to help minimize downtime and ensure emergencies are reported promptly.

**Safety:** Review company policies and procedures on accidents, moving violations, hours-of-service rules, safe driving and parking rules, and cargo securement. When drug and alcohol testing is performed, make drivers aware of the company's testing procedures and prohibited conduct.

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**Training:** Orientation is an optimal time to provide training that may be required by law or necessary to perform the job safely and effectively. Defensive driving training is an important part of any orientation program. It can increase the driver's safety awareness and also communicates the company's commitment to safety. For companies required by the Department of Transportation to conduct drug and alcohol testing, providing information on substance abuse and alcohol use in the workplace is required. Companies that transport hazardous materials are required by the Hazardous Materials Regulations to provide general awareness, function-specific, security awareness and safety training (49 CFR, Part 172.700-704). Additional training that may be required includes forklift training and brake inspector training. Providing training that addresses how to operate special loading and unloading equipment or special cargo securement procedures is also a good idea.

**Maintenance:** Drivers should be familiar with the equipment they will be operating. Time should be spent demonstrating how the equipment works and any special or non-standard features. This part of the orientation should include a review of company maintenance and inspection procedures, driver pre- and post- trip inspection requirements, reporting defects, breakdown procedures and vehicle care. Reviewing any special safety features, such as speed governors, security devices, backup alarms and automatic collision avoidance systems is important.

**Regulatory:** Drivers should understand the regulatory requirements associated with their positions. This may require discussing special permits, hours-of-service rules, special license endorsements that may be required, and hazardous material shipping and placarding requirements, among other things.

Companies that invest the time and effort into creating a formal orientation program that fits their operation can benefit in many ways. It can help prepare new employees to become safe, productive and valuable employees. It also can help them become familiar with all aspects of the company, in turn helping them feel confident in their work and helping to foster a good employee-employer relationship from the start. This can impact a company's ability to retain good employees.

# SAMPLE ORIENTATION PROGRAM CHECKLIST

## Company Information

- Company history and operations
- Mission statement
- Company future
- Introduction to key personnel and their responsibilities

## Personnel

- Company policies and procedures
- Pay and benefits
- Expense reimbursements and advances
- Performance reviews
- Corrective action policies and procedures
- Drug and alcohol testing requirements

## Operations

- Dispatch procedures
- Routes
- Cargo
- Customers
- Hazardous materials

## Safety

- Safety rules
- Driver qualification requirements
- Accident response, investigation, and reporting procedures
- Security procedures
- Safety devices
- Cargo securement
- Safety bonuses and awards

## Communications

- Check-in requirements
- Communication devices
- Emergency and after-hours contacts

## Training

- Vehicle and equipment use
- Defensive driving
- Training required by the company
- Training required by regulations

## Maintenance

- Pre- and post-trip inspections
- Reporting mechanical problems
- Company maintenance and inspection procedures
- Breakdowns
- Vehicle care

## Regulatory

- Permits
- Licensing, certification, and endorsement requirements
- Hours-of-service rules
- Hazardous materials shipping and handling requirements

## Handouts

- Employee handbook (if applicable)
- Training manuals
- Regulatory reference materials (e.g. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations handbook, Hazardous Materials Emergency Response guidebook)