



RISK CONTROL SOLUTIONS

A Service of the Michigan Municipal League Liability and Property Pool and
the Michigan Municipal League Workers' Compensation Fund

VEHICLE OPERATIONS – REDUCING THE RISK

DEVELOPING A VEHICLE OPERATIONS POLICY

OVERVIEW

The use of motor vehicles is crucial to the operations of any public agency. Driving can account for a large portion of an employee's daily work schedule and the potential for loss is significant. Personal injury and property damage are the most frequent causes of loss. However, the negligent operation of motor vehicles represents one of the few exceptions to governmental immunity and can expose a public agency to civil liability and increase the severity of losses.

Developing a motor vehicle operations policy and programs that are well-considered, comprehensive, and effective is crucial to reducing your organization's loss exposure, as these will guide the actions of all employees who operate vehicles as part of their jobs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I. **Develop and implement motor vehicle policies and programs that together form an integrated approach to controlling motor vehicle exposures.**
 - 1) A vehicle operations risk control/safety committee can be established for this purpose or the function can be added to an existing safety committee.
 - 2) The committee responsible should:
 - include representatives from each department, and
 - have the authority to address identified risk exposures.
 - 3) During the policy and program development process, the committee should:
 - conduct a loss analysis that identifies the nature of past losses, both for the organization as a whole and by department;
 - evaluate how effective existing policies, procedures, practices, or programs have been at addressing and preventing such losses;
 - assess risk exposure categories in which the agency has not yet suffered a loss;
 - assess other risk exposures common to public agency operations;

- inspect all of the organization’s locations to identify hazards that might affect the safe operations of vehicles at each site;
- inspect and evaluate existing safety and emergency equipment and analyze future needs;
- gather ideas, information, and expertise from both internal and external sources;
- consider the organization’s overall goals and objectives.

II. Include the following elements in your organization’s motor vehicle operations policy:

- 1) Mandatory compliance with all applicable state laws or local ordinances.
- 2) Screening and hiring specifications for positions that require the employee to operate motor vehicles as part of their overall job assignment.
- 3) Specific licensing requirements, based on job assignment.
- 4) Employee training requirements, including documentation of trainings and attendance.
- 5) Guidelines for vehicle use, including specific policies for the safe operation and maintenance of high-profile vehicles such as 15-passenger vans.
- 6) Requirements for vehicle maintenance, inspection, and replacement, as well as for documentation of these activities.
- 7) Requirements for use of seat belts and other available safety devices and prohibitions against the modification, removal, or disabling of installed or available safety devices.
- 8) Rules and guidelines to address distracted driving.
- 9) Rider/passenger eligibility (only employees and only when necessary to the job).
- 10) Occupant protection and passenger safety.
- 11) Requirements and procedures for accident documentation, review, and analysis.
- 12) Establish oversight responsibilities at all levels of the agency.
- 13) Generally apply to all departments, but permit modification for specific departments, areas, or services, and accommodate special operational requirements, such as emergency medical response or heavy equipment operation.
- 14) Include, if possible, a driver recognition or incentive program to promote morale and encourage conformance to departmental objectives and directives. The program may offer incentives such as:
 - uniform pins;
 - certificates;
 - acknowledgment in local media;
 - an additional vacation day.

III. Monitor vehicle-related losses and exposures on an ongoing basis. Modify policies and programs to improve results and adapt to changing requirements or circumstances.

- 1) The vehicle operations risk control/safety committee should review and investigate all motor vehicle-related incidents or losses to determine:
 - if possible, the incident's root cause;
 - whether the incident was preventable and, if so, how;
 - whether misconduct or a violation of policies, procedures, or the law contributed to the incident;
 - whether safety equipment, or the lack of it, was a factor.
 - whether existing policies, procedures, and training programs adequately address the cause of the incident, or if modifications are needed to address this category of loss.
- 2) The committee should evaluate current and new risk exposures, which may involve site visits to reevaluate hazards and safety equipment.
- 3) The committee should meet at least annually for a review of written policies, training programs, loss data, and other relevant information. This review should determine whether the program:
 - is reaching its goals and objectives;
 - complies with recent changes in the law or new federal or state mandates;
 - satisfies contemporary standards;
 - requires modification to improve effectiveness, reflect current needs or new service commitments.
- 4) The committee should modify or implement new policies and programs as needed.


This Risk Control Solution is one of a 4-part series that addresses ways to reduce the risks of municipal vehicle operations. The entire set consists of:

Vehicle Operations – Reducing the Risks

- *Vehicle Operations – A Management Brief*
- *Vehicle Operations – Developing a Vehicle Operations Policy*
- *Vehicle Operations – Hiring and Training*
- *Vehicle Operations – Vehicle Inspections & Maintenance*

This series is available online at: <https://mml.org/programs-services/risk-management/risk-management-resources/risk-control-solutions/>

***Contact MML Risk Management Services Staff/
or your Loss Control Consultant for more information.***

	Important Phone Numbers	
MML Risk Management Services		734.662.3246 or 800.653.2483
Loss Control Services		800.482.0626

Note:

***This document is not intended to be legal advice.
It only identifies some of the issues surrounding this topic.
Public agencies are encouraged to review their procedures with an expert
or a competent attorney who is knowledgeable about the subject.***