

Who should be driving (and riding) in your vehicles?

By Kim Dennis

Fleets are a growing risk management challenge for public entities. With increased traffic, distractions, and a diverse fleet of vehicles, mitigating claim costs can become a full-time job. Knowing who is driving your vehicles is one highly effective way to protect against vehicle injury and property claims from occurring.

What can members do?

WCIA members should verify that all employees who operate any vehicle within the course and scope of employment meet all licensing, driving qualifications, and training requirements. Members should determine and develop specific driver qualifications for their operations, keeping in mind higher standards reduces the potential for accidents and encourages capable, qualified drivers.

A written vehicle use policy is essential to set clear and consistent expectations for drivers. Clearly define who can use a municipal vehicle and when, as well as a process for approving use of personal cars on municipal business. Be sure to outline minimum insurance requirements for those who use their vehicles on the job. Other topics to include:

- Vehicle operator safety such as the use of seatbelts and prohibiting the use of cell phones.
- Driver eligibility, including a minimum age of 18, valid driver's license and acceptable Abstract of Driving Record.
- Prohibition of drug (including prescription, illegal, and over the counter medications which could impair driving ability) and alcohol usage.

Screening and selecting drivers carefully can help create a reliable, safe team. Without safe drivers, no organization is likely to have a good long-term safety record. Establish clear hiring standards and a thorough screening process for anyone who drives on agency business.

Drivers must show proof of proper licensing and members should check the validity of the license on the [WA State Department of Licensing website](#). Employee driving abstracts should be requested and evaluated at the time of hiring as well as on an ongoing, regular basis. Members can use a driver evaluation point system and evaluation matrix to determine if current employees or potential new employees are eligible to operate a motor vehicle within the course and scope of their employment, based on their driving history.

What happens when an employee is driving their personal vehicle for business?

Employees driving their personal vehicle for work related tasks should undergo the same selection and screening process as those driving member vehicles. They should also agree to the agency's vehicle use policy. Members should make employees aware that in the State of WA, insurance follows the vehicle, so their personal insurance policy will be primary should an incident occur.

What about volunteers?

Volunteers using agency vehicles should follow the same policies and screening procedures as employees who utilize agency vehicles. Volunteers do not receive medical benefits through the WA Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) as regular employees do unless their hours are reported to L&I.

Can employees carry passengers in public vehicles?

It is important for each member to develop a policy regarding allowing passengers in agency owned vehicles. Keep in mind when developing your policy that passengers riding in member vehicles are not provided uninsured, underinsured, medical pay or personal injury protection (PIP) coverage.

If a member wishes to avoid the risks associated with allowing passengers altogether, the member's policy should prohibit non-employee, non-business associates from riding in member vehicles. Additionally, members should contract for transportation services for senior groups and recreation programs.

If a member chooses to allow non-employee, non-business associates to ride as passengers in member vehicles, the member should develop a policy that addresses the following items, including, but not limited to:

1. Appropriate situations when a non-employee is allowed to be a passenger in a member vehicle.
2. Passenger restraint usage and enforcement.
3. Use of personal protective equipment as necessary for the situation (i.e., hearing protection provided to passengers in fire engines).
4. Utilization of liability waivers (See [FLT.01.02](#) Sample Request for Permission to Ride).

Creating and committing to a safe driving culture will go a long way towards keeping your employees safe and your property protected.

As always, contact your assigned WCIA Risk Management Representative for additional information or review the fleet guidelines in the [Liability Resource Manual](#) located on the WCIA website.