



spotlight on risk management

Risk Management Solutions to Highway Department Turnover

—Jodi Traas, Senior Risk Management Consultant, Aegis Corporation

The greatest task in risk management is risk identification and hazard analysis. We simply cannot eliminate or prevent the incident if we do not first identify the hazard. While I have been providing risk management and safety training to highway departments for over fifteen years, this past year I found many new faces in the audience and began exploring the risks associated with increases in turnover.

Recent increases in turnover rates are a result of retirements and terminations from changing union contracts and will continue as the baby boomers reach retirement. The importance of training, awareness and compliance is critical as highway administrative staff also contribute to the rate of turnover. While most new highway commissioners have worked in the department or held similar positions elsewhere, there is still a learning curve to every new position.

I conducted a brief, state-wide survey to determine what the exact turnover rates looked like and was delighted by a 88% response rate.

Please peruse the graphics on the following page highlighting significant turnover rates in the past year. One county alone, while only having 8%

turnover this year, has had 58% over the past four years.

Where does your county fall? What can each county do to ensure the safety of their staff and the public? First, take the time to find the most qualified candidates. Only 15% of respondents indicated that they would not fill the vacancies in their staff. Second, effective training is always the key. Strong support from the highway committee and county board for training time and resources can reduce worker's compensation costs and liability losses down the road.

Solutions:

- New employee orientation programs. Some departments require a step process whereas the new operator first rides along, then operates the truck with a designated observer and finally, the supervisor rides with the new operator to certify the driver is capable (Clark and Jackson Counties). New employees are trained with an experienced driver during several snow storms. Orientation programs in which the employee is inundated with all the training information in a

continues



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training and address any other safety concerns. A wide range of topics can ensure the safety committee always has a full agenda. Rotating members can provide new ideas and increase safety awareness. Members should represent different areas, such as: field, shop, mechanic, administration and a county board highway committee representative. An employee representative should then participate in the county-wide safety committee. Safety committee members may assist in conducting incident investigations to determine underlying causes. Members should be responsible for conducting annual safety surveys of the facilities. Providing early return to work opportunities for staff on work related restrictions can benefit not only the bottom line but also decrease recovery length.

- ❑ Job Safety Analysis (JSA) prompts recognition of hazards. Waukesha County uses this method for frequently conducted tasks, such as guard rail repair, tree cutting, crack filling and back up procedures.
- ❑ Daily inspection forms ensure safety compliance. Inspection forms and checklists should be implemented for all vehicles and heavy equipment (Washburn County). Shop manuals and field operations should also be available to complete self-governing and compliance review (Oconto County).
- ❑ Take advantage of no cost or low cost training. In 2013, the Wisconsin County Mutual will be offering several additional programs to assist training endeavors. Work Zone & Flagger Safety Workshops will be provided in 6 locations spread throughout the state. As in 2012, there will be Highway Safety Days in Stevens Point and Rice Lake to comply with MSHA training requirements and address hot topics. Our risk management staff assists with highway

safety days throughout the state and encourages counties to coordinate with other counties to expand resources, network and enjoy friendly competition.

- ❑ Simulators provide a hands-on training opportunity. Sauk County has a snowplow driving simulator available for the low cost of \$20/person if a county provides the simulator operator. Also, consider technical colleges that have simulators and driving schools.
- ❑ Weekly or monthly tool box talks increase safety awareness and identify hazards before they become losses. Short 10 minute sessions can be conducted anywhere, including at a work site (
- ❑ Mentor programs utilize the employee with the best work practices to train new staff regardless of previous experience (Dunn and St. Croix Counties). Bayfield County trains one-on-one for safety sensitive duties such as flagging. New employees have innovative and creative ways to improve safety, so do not hesitate to consider their suggestions. It is critical that all staff and administration be good role models and follow the safety rules.
- ❑ Document all training efforts and maintain records. Safety training is an ongoing process regardless of turnover (Grant County).

Risk management is a continuous improvement process. While training time and effort may initially incur costs, the benefits of the above programs will ultimately reduce your worker's compensation costs and liability losses, increase productivity and improve morale. Each helps your budget in the long run while keeping your staff and the public safe. ❏