

Optimizing Safety in Oil & Gas Fleets

*Today's Risks and Practical
Tools to Mitigate Them*


Merchants
FLEET



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Today's Safety Risks

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Drugs: Legalized Vs. Legal

As marijuana legalization sweeps across the country and opioid use and abuse has developed into a national epidemic, fleet managers are faced with addressing the growing trend of risky behaviors that compromise drivers' ability to operate their fleet vehicles safely.

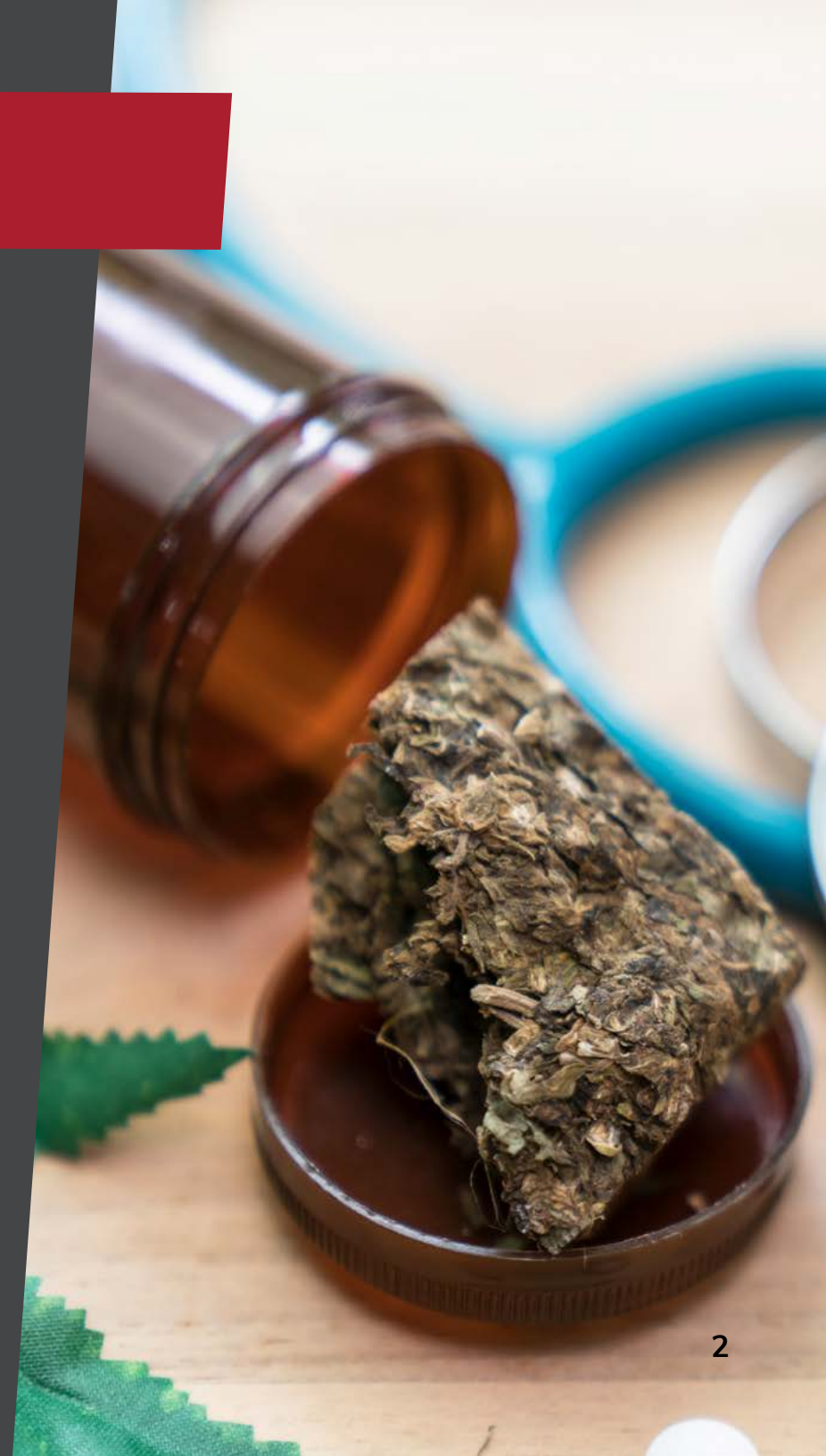
Marijuana

Although marijuana remains illegal on the federal level, 10 states have legalized both recreational and medical marijuana, and another 23 have legalized medical marijuana use. Initial research is showing that recreational marijuana legalization is having a negative impact on highway safety: according to the Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) and Highway Loss Data Institute (HLDI), accidents are up almost 6% in Colorado, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington when compared to the neighboring states of Idaho, Montana, Utah and Wyoming, which have not legalized recreational marijuana.

Prescription Drugs

Prescription medication is also a concern that can't be overlooked. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of opioid prescriptions has been falling. However, prescribing rates remain high in certain areas of the country, and in 2017 nearly 200 million opioid prescriptions were dispensed, with an average of 3.4 opioid prescriptions dispensed per patient. It is also worth noting that there are many other types of medications beyond cannabis and opioid-based treatment that affect driving ability.

In this type of legal and cultural environment, how do fleet managers best protect drivers and fleet assets? How do they drive behavior change, especially if conflicting state and federal regulations create confusion or misconceptions?



Devices: Fighting Distraction

In addition to drug use, device use is a persistent safety challenge. A number of recent studies found that drivers talking on a hands-free mobile device displayed the same level of impairment as driving under the influence. Some studies found that it was actually worse. If you are driving 55 miles per hour and take your eyes off the road for five seconds to read a text or find contact information, that is the same as driving the length of a football field with your eyes closed. Accidents happen when drivers are not clearly focused on the road, and making sure that drivers feel the weight of responsibility to operate safely requires consistent reinforcement.

Nearly all 50 states and the District of Columbia have some form of distracted driving regulations on the books, but they vary widely from only restricting teens and texting to a complete ban on all handheld usage for all drivers. We are all so conditioned to communicating in real time at all times, grabbing the phone has become an unconscious action, legal or not.

While a zero-tolerance drug policy is a go-to approach for many fleet organizations, applying that to mobile technologies is unrealistic. Distracted driving is a dilemma for fleet managers looking to leverage useful technology to improve fleet operations and provide drivers with connectivity that helps them do their jobs more efficiently. It is a complicated balancing act. How much is too much? What technologies are truly necessary and how can you train and incentivize drivers to use them safely?



Addressing Safety with Policy

When addressing safety challenges like device use and drugs, setting company policies is critical. Clearly defined driver safety policies should consider federal regulations and the laws of the states in which the organization operates. Drivers may cross state lines, but ultimately, it should be the company line that matters most. They need to be made aware that the organization's safe-driving policy supersedes state laws and that the company will let them know what actions it will take, should violations occur.

Written procedures in place for employees returning to work after an injury or illness should be supportive and provide the means to disclose any ongoing treatment involving medication. It may involve giving the employee an administrative role until it is safe for them to be back behind the wheel. Having someone supervise their driving to make sure they can operate a vehicle safely is also a good practice, as is requiring a written clearance by a physician.

Drug Policy Sample Language

1. If an employee operates a vehicle while under the influence of drugs, alcohol, or under physical disability, or operates said vehicle in a grossly negligent manner or with reckless disregard for others, then the employee will be subject to disciplinary action and be responsible to the company for the full amount of resultant damage to the vehicle and to the other person's property or injury caused by such conduct.
2. In addition, all employees are expected to drive defensively, obey all traffic laws, and not drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If a driver is taking any medication labeled with a warning that it could impair his/her driving ability, the employee must provide his/her supervisor with the name of the prescription drug.

Mobile Usage Sample Policy

Prepare Pre-Trip: Update any communications from the home office, program the vehicle's GPS device with the next location, and be completely prepped for the next stop before putting the car in drive.

Limited Smartphone Use: When driving, cell phone use should be limited to GPS functionality only when vehicle is in drive.



Addressing Safety with Upfitting

While devices and drugs are tangible and top-of-mind, they are just part of the larger risk mitigation puzzle. Making sure drivers have the right equipment for the job also plays a role in safety for oil & gas fleets. Workers' compensation insurance rates have been rising steadily, and industries that rely on drivers and technicians to operate vehicle equipment are at particular risk for claims. Well-spec'd upfit designs can significantly mitigate that risk, just as a poorly spec'd upfit design can create problems.

Be Strategic

Taking the time to approach the process strategically, with a focus on developing well-designed vehicles and upfit specifications, can increase driver efficiency and safety while reducing costs over the vehicle lifecycle. Getting feedback from your drivers and technicians is the best place to begin. Partnering with an experienced truck & upfit engineer will help ensure you take the right approach and install the best options available.

Design with Ergonomics in Mind

Upfit packages that are ergonomically designed for specific job requirements can lessen the chance for injuries and driver downtime. Equipment such as step bumpers, side steps, grab handles and drop-down ladder racks can reduce strains and fatigue while also improving efficiency.

Utilize Safety Equipment Additions

Equipment such as rearview and/or side camera systems, exterior warning lights, lane departure avoidance systems, front and rear sensing systems, back-up alarms and spot mirrors can increase vehicle visibility, driver alertness and awareness.



Implementing Safety Changes that Work

Even with a clear policy and properly spec-ed equipment, many fleet managers hit the same stumbling block - how do you take a program from a piece of paper to actual behavior change? Choosing the right technology, monitoring behaviors, and creating effective policies and training programs can reduce costs and save lives.

Fleet safety programs should include some sort of company action plan that rewards positive behavior, penalizes negative behaviors, or both. The program needs to be developed with both the legal obligations and the company culture in mind as well as budgetary and operational resources. Incentives and rewards might include accident-free celebrations, accumulation of safe-driving points that can be redeemed for prizes, a running tally of cost reduction for accident-free operation, and bonuses for returning vehicles in good condition.

Penalty policies are typically based upon analysis of preventable accidents. The priority is to set protocols that protect the organization and provide employees with a very clear understanding of those policies, including what will happen in the case of an at-fault accident. Was the employee using a mobile phone inappropriately? Will they be tested for drugs? After one offense, will they run through safety training and pass a safety test before returning to their regular operation? What happens after a second offense, etc.? If the fleet uses telematics, will erratic driving alerts trigger any kind of action?

Policy and culture combined with ongoing analysis of driving trends across a fleet provides the platform for both heading off potential problems and addressing them when they do arise.



We're Here to Help

Need assistance with optimizing your fleet's safety program or upfitting?

Visit us at merchantsfleet.com, call 866.653.2737 or email leasecontact@merchantsfleet.com.

