

Loss Control Can Help Clients Grow Their Business

By: Eileen Currie

New England's economy has been enjoying a drop in unemployment recently. Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont have unemployment rates well below the national jobless rate of 5.1 percent. And in August, Connecticut, Maine and Rhode Island saw their lowest unemployment numbers since the recession. Massachusetts has added roughly 56,500 jobs this year, according to the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, many in professional and business services.

This is great news for the local workforce and economy. But with more employment options available for workers, commercial fleet managers will need to do more to attract top-talent drivers. Fortunately, independent insurance agents are well-positioned to provide clients with valuable guidance and resources for acquiring the safest and most prudent drivers. In doing so, agents can subsequently prevent losses, reduce their clients' overall premium and grow their business.

Establishing Driver Qualification Standards

Driver selection is a multistep process that, when implemented effectively, can drastically reduce the potential for accidents and minimize a commercial fleet's liability. Independent agents who encourage their commercial fleet clients to take the appropriate steps to minimize losses can develop a stronger, safer group of commercial fleet accounts that are more attractive to underwriters. In addition to the standard application and driver's license verification, best practices in hiring include understanding state and federal hiring rules; requiring and reviewing the candidate's Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) and medical certificate; conducting reference and background checks, and drug, alcohol and road tests; and more often administering personality assessment tools to further ensure that the candidate is the right fit for the

demands of the job. To help ensure that each step in the process is adequately addressed, Arbella Insurance Group's loss control team provides its independent agents with guidance on driver selection that includes, among other tools, a driver qualification checklist for use by their clients.

The most essential part of a commercial fleet's driver qualification process is reviewing each applicant's motor vehicle record: this is the company's best indication of how a prospective driver will represent their business while on the road. A driver with three or more violations, at-fault accidents or both in the last three years is more likely to be involved in an accident than one with no violations or accidents. Loss control experts can partner with independent agents to jointly visit clients and help the client understand each aspect of the motor vehicle record. The agent and the loss control consultant could train the fleet managers on potential red flags and other things to look for when reviewing a potential driver's record. Assisting commercial fleet clients in developing motor vehicle record standards makes a clear distinction between acceptable and unacceptable drivers.

Implementing an Effective Training Program

Once commercial fleet managers have selected the right driver to represent their business, they should then facilitate a comprehensive training program to ensure drivers consistently practice the necessary safety precautions on the road. Providing the right training, tools and resources can help an agent's clients prevent losses, and demonstrate that the agent is a trusted advisor who understands and responds to their needs.

Loss control teams could partner with independent agents to offer driver training resources to fleets of all sizes,

including on-site classroom training and materials such as a safe driver handbook. Every client is unique and training is most effective when the agent, loss control representative and client work together to develop a training program that works best for their drivers. The topics covered in driver training classes could include pre-trip safety, special conditions and situational driving. The classes could also incorporate the client's own data and loss experience, giving drivers an opportunity to monitor their driving habits and the areas in which they can improve.

The following is an example of how beneficial this kind of collaboration can be. The director of operations at a landscaping company approached his Arbella independent agent with some concerns about driver training for his employees. While most of his drivers spoke and understood English, he explained that they had trouble reading and writing in the language, and a traditional classroom setting would not be right for them. In this case, Arbella's loss control team assessed the specific needs of the drivers and tailored the standard training program for the client. They used more interactive and hands-on methods, including group exercises, discussions and video. They matched English-speaking employees with Spanish- and Tibetan-speaking employees who then worked together on the exercises, creating high participation and engagement in the training. Many drivers who felt they didn't need training before they entered the program stated that they walked away with valuable information that they would not have received otherwise. Finding ways to customize fleet training is a valuable opportunity for independent agents not only to strengthen their commercial fleet account and enhance its underwriting desirability, but also to gain the trust of their clients.

In today's insurance landscape, it is more important than ever to demonstrate the value of a local, independent agent through one-on-one communication and consultation. Independent agents who help clients put the best drivers on the road help their clients' businesses thrive and strengthen

and grow their own book of business. Most importantly, an independent agent's guidance instills faith in his or her clients and assures them that they are working with someone who is knowledgeable, trustworthy and cares about their success — a valuable competitive advantage that cannot be replicated. ■

Eileen Currie is senior vice president of commercial lines at Arbella Insurance Group.

Big Lots Faces OSHA Fine for Mass. Employee's Injury

BOSTON — Big Lots Stores Inc. is facing a fine from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) after an employee was injured by falling boxes at a Massachusetts store.

An assistant manager at the Danvers, Mass., Big Lots store was hospitalized after boxes of patio furniture and other stock, weighing up to 53 pounds each, fell and struck him in the store's stockroom.

OSHA's investigation found that numerous boxes of stock were stacked high and in an unstable condition throughout the storeroom. In addition, the storeroom's aisles were clogged by boxes of stock, broken wooden pallets, plastic wrap, packing materials and pieces of cardboard. These conditions exposed employees to fractures, broken bones, concussion, sprains and other injuries as well as to being trapped or unable to exit the storeroom swiftly in the event of a fire, noted the report.

OSHA has proposed a \$66,000 fine.

"Every workplace — including a retail store — has potential hazards. Unsafely stacked stock resulted in serious and avoidable injuries for this Big Lots employee. For the safety and well-being of all its employees, Big Lots must promptly and effectively address these hazards at all its locations to prevent future injuries," said Anthony Covello, OSHA's acting area director in Andover.

OSHA previously cited the retailer for similar issues in West Babylon, New York, and Warner Robins, Georgia, locations.

Big Lots Stores Inc. has 15 business days from receipt of the citation to comply, request an informal conference with OSHA's area director or contest the citations and penalties before the independent Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission. ■

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