

## **GOOD DRIVERS ARE AN INVALUABLE ASSET TO ANY FLEET**

With trucks an ever-present reality on South African roads, it is important that their drivers adhere to strict health and safety standards. This is not always easy when they have to deal with heavy work schedules, poor roads, bad fellow drivers and numerous other challenges.

Innovative Staffing Solutions Managing Director, Arnoux Maré, says South Africa's truck drivers play a critical role in the economy, transporting more than 88% of cargo around the country. "They are as much an asset to their organisations as the often formidable vehicles they drive and need the ongoing support of their fleet managers.

"With more than 5,500 drivers in our employ, we have learned a lot from the various predicaments they find themselves in. We feel we are well positioned to offer our top seven safety guidelines aimed at keeping truck drivers and other road users safe," adds Maré.

1. A lack of sleep can have similar effects on the body and mind as alcohol. It follows, then, that driver fatigue is one of the most dangerous aspects of long-distance driving. Many drivers are not aware of how exhaustion can impair their cognitive and motor abilities, making them a liability on the country's roads.

Symptoms of fatigue such as yawning, sore or heavy eyes, slower reaction times, daydreaming, impatience, stiffness and cramps can lead to erratic behaviour, including drifting, straddling lanes, losing control of the vehicle, accidents and, at worst, death.

Tips to avoid fatigue:

- Get enough sleep – for drivers undertaking a long-haul drive, eight hours of sleep the night before is recommended.
- Keep hydrated – drinking water regularly helps keep the mind sharp and body alert.
- Stop and stretch – it is important to pull over and get out of the truck to stretch as often as possible. Drivers should try and stop every two hours. Even a five-minute stop and stretch can revitalise the body and mind.
- Eat healthily – convenience nibbles aren't always the healthiest. Drivers should try to avoid food that is high in sugar and salt. Rather, they should stick to high protein, low

GI foods with natural sugars. This will help in sustaining and balancing physical and mental energy.

- If fatigue or drowsiness persists, drivers need to pull over into a service station and get some rest.
2. Drivers need to familiarise themselves with the vehicles they operate. While they don't need not be mechanics, a basic working knowledge of the vehicle's systems can assist in speedily diagnosing potential problems.
  3. The more technology advances, the more likely it is for complications to arise. A GPS is a convenient piece of technology, but if it doesn't work, or fails, drivers should have road maps as back-up, and be able to read them. An added benefit is having a general sense of the lay of the land.
  4. Staying up-to-date with the weather, traffic and news reports can help drivers better plan and navigate on their trips. The weather plays an important role in driving – bad weather means drivers need to be more alert and cautious, which can affect their arrival times. News and traffic reports can alert drivers to potential obstacles or closures of main routes, allowing them to make the necessary adjustments.
  5. A truck becomes a mobile office (and home) for long distance drivers. Employing a system for tracking collections, deliveries and expenses increases drivers' levels of efficiency and productivity, allowing them to dedicate their attention and energy to the job at hand.
  6. Because road rage is a reality on South African roads, stress management is a vital skill for truck drivers to acquire. The long hours and looming possibility of missing the delivery deadline can increase stress levels, making an already demanding job more difficult. Simply choosing not to engage with an irate or reckless driver will not only save precious time, but sometimes even a life. Music and deep breathing can be great stress relievers.
  7. Regular vehicle safety checks before, during and after embarking on each trip are fundamental to arriving alive at one's destination. Issues, should there be any, can be picked up immediately and mitigated before they turn into disasters.

Innovative Staffing Solutions offers a holistic training course for drivers to ensure they are more than roadworthy. "It is essential for transport and logistics companies to make sure their drivers are not only well trained, but that their fleets are managed with precision. We offer a 360-degree service to transportation companies, from fleet service management to driver training," concludes Maré.

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