

PRAISE

Preventing Road Accidents and Injuries for the Safety of Employees

Case study: Kajon Taxi

ETSC's PRAISE project addresses the safety aspects of driving at work and driving to work. Its aim is to promote best practice in order to help employers secure high road safety standards for their employees.

In this interview, **Juha Wallius** from Kajon, a national taxi firm based in Finland, discusses the organisation's approach to applying road safety risk management in a large taxi firm.



How do you manage work-related road risk?

There is regular cooperation on occupational safety and health matters in an elected committee which has representatives from both the drivers and office personnel. They assess risks, monitor occupational collisions and make recommendations on how to improve safety in the future. The work safety manager leads this group and brings these matters to the executive board. This committee has meetings several times in a year. Day-to-day matters are handled in the office by our regional managers and personnel manager.

A comprehensive risk assessment tool has led to various actions to improve safety. Most of the actions involve giving information to our personnel through our training programme, personnel magazine or intranet – we also have an automated interval messaging system directly to each vehicle.

FACTFILE

Company:	Kajon Taxi
Sector:	Taxi and minibus transport
Fleet:	150 vehicles (4-45 passengers + wheelchair access)

What are the in-vehicle technologies you have adopted?

All vehicles have been equipped with alcohol interlocks since 2007. Four years later, the legislation in Finland made them compulsory in school transportation. Being in the frontline of this development gave the company positive publicity and the chance to share user experience with the alcohol interlock industry and officials in advance. There were 278 traffic casualties in Finland in 2015 and roughly 20% of the collisions were caused by the use of alcohol.

Kajon has its own alcohol interlock policy which is distributed to staff. It has been made clear that any suspicion of driving over the legal limit of 0.5 BAC will be reported to the police. The wireless interlock is set to prevent starting the engine with any result over 0.2 BAC. These results are instantly reported via SMS message to supervisors and typically result in a warning and an interview to address any problems related to alcohol use. Work contracts forbid consuming alcohol before a shift. Any attempt to bypass the alcohol interlock or driving over the legal limit results in dismissing the driver.

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Every car has a touch screen computer with a growing number of features. For instance, the location and speed of each vehicle is stored in certain time intervals and can be viewed also in real-time on the company intranet. In school transportation, our drivers can follow the list of addresses and pupils on-line, avoiding any unnecessary trips for pupils whose transportation has been cancelled. This electronic time-tabled list is easily and quickly redistributable to another car in case of driver sickness or car malfunction – without having to take notes over the phone.

It is possible to chat with and inform other drivers through the touch screen. This feature helps with selecting of alternative routes and avoiding traffic congestion due to collisions.

The buses that have digital tachographs are remotely read through the same collector interface that also sends out other data. Thus drive times and resting periods of each bus driver is available even for the time periods of which the driver has forgotten to upload data from the driver card. Finnish officials tend to ask for such information to oversee that the social legislation on road traffic is being followed.

Do you have any procedures in place to mitigate driver fatigue?

We consider electronic fatigue tracking systems too expensive at present. Drivers working regular night time hours are called for biannual check-ups by our occupational health care provider. They help our drivers to maintain a healthy lifestyle – with enough nutrition, exercise and sleep to be able to work night shifts in good shape. The driver is always personally responsible for being fit to drive.

How do you manage speed?

Our buses are equipped with a speed limiter set at 100 km/h, as required by law. The maximum speed in school transportation is 80 km/h. This rule is repeated to drivers in their training with us. We have wide visibility in traffic and the Kajon fleet is recognised in the area of its operation. Therefore, we get quick feedback if a blue taxi or bus is seen speeding on the road – especially from residential areas with a 30 km/h speed limit. With our tracking system it is easy to verify speeding and make contact with the driver to reiterate the importance of safe driving. If the complaints keep coming about the same driver, a warning is issued. So far, dismissals haven't been necessary. Speeding is fined by the police and three tickets within a year lead to license suspension. The fines are also heavy in Finland.

Stress can become a health and safety risk for taxi drivers. How do you manage this?

We have categorised stress with a value of three in our risk scale, which goes from 1-5. Therefore, it is under constant observation by management and fellow drivers.

Not everyone is cut out to be a taxi driver. It is a demanding task and can be stressful. It is important that this is discussed at the interview and recruitment phase.

Driving is also a lonely profession. To raise team spirit and create some work well-being, drivers from regional teams meet monthly for a chat over some refreshments. One of the drivers acts as a team leader and the regional manager is also there in the office for some guidance and support. Kajon also organises parties for all staff twice a year, in January after the busy period and in June before summer vacations. Our daily chat system, social media channels and monthly personnel magazine help with contact in between these occasions. It is important to be able to discuss stressful situations and see that we are not alone. For stress relief, we have started an association called FC Kajon, which is a club for after work activities. It gathers groups with the same interests for soccer, boating, bowling, poker etc.

Do you plan shifts and break times in advance?

Cars with multiple drivers (2-4) have a shift change typically after 12 hours. Within that time, drivers are supposed to follow rules and regulations on work and break times. They should know them through their basic training for the job. Digital tachographs in buses follow these times and they leave a record of them in driver cards and on our intranet through a collector interface. Taxi drivers should fill up a daily diary and send the copies every week to the office. We are planning to digitise this diary process.

Have you implemented any specific measures for reducing risks associated with journeys?

The regular transportation lists are planned to result in the shortest and safest routes possible. The notifications of absence are relayed to drivers through an electronic list system to avoid unnecessary travelling. Drivers observe the traffic and listen to traffic broadcasts and inform about any problems (congestion, wildlife on the road etc.) to others through our chat system. It is emphasised, however, that it is better to be late than take risks to catch up with the timetable. Our customers understand reasons of force majeure, as long as we keep them informed.

Are there any special rules for taxis in Finland that are worth mentioning?

The taxi business is highly regulated by law in Finland. The amount of taxi permits is set to satisfy the demand, the price is the same everywhere and also the quality of taxi services is written in law in great detail.

As to the rules of traffic, taxis are allowed to use bus lanes almost everywhere. Child seat regulations can be ignored in a taxi. Using a safety belt is optional when the driver is with a customer. Taxi drivers must follow the general law of working hours. The minimum resting periods are given daily and weekly and it doesn't give much extra time for working compared to the drive and rest periods of a bus driver. Work contracts for both typically set the work time to 80 hours within a period of two weeks.

What other kind of software do you use in your daily management and safety operations?

The condition of the cars is monitored through software. Each time the driver of a vehicle changes, a check list must be approved and all faults and shortcomings have to be reported to the office. The in-house repair shop then fixes any problems and also performs the maintenance service. This system also reminds drivers

of annual vehicle inspections. Another piece of software helps the HR department ensure that the drivers have their professional qualifications up to date.

Do you have any measurement of the financial benefits and cost savings achieved after implementing these changes?

It is quite difficult to tell exactly, what role each of these features play in the big picture. It is clear, however, that only fit drivers and cars can deliver results. Any avoided collision means avoided costs and less human suffering.

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In the early years of alcohol interlocks, we managed to beat one of our rivals offering the same price on a school transportation route. This was achieved by the extra quality points given by the use of an alcohol interlock.

Do you offer additional training to drivers?

First aid training is in the basic course of both taxi and bus drivers and is repeated every five years. Other topics include safe and economic driving, customer service and social and other legislation related to professional road traffic, according to the latest changes.

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