

Big Rigs and Heavy Loads: Precast Concrete Driver Safety

NPCA's Safety, Health and Environmental Committee (SHE) members asked their companies' precast delivery drivers and plant safety management staffs to address driver safety. Committee members who obtained information for this article are: Bonnie Wasson of U.S. Concrete Precast Group – Phoenix; Tammy Hammonds of Foley Products Co. of Columbus, Ga.; and David Parkhurst of Insurance & Benefits Group in Lee's Summit, Mo. Contributors from U.S. Concrete Precast Group are Scott Kew, driver, and Mike Landis, safety manager; and from Foley Products, contributors are William "D. J." Johnson, driver, and James "Tony" Smith, safety manager. David Parkhurst provides his own comments.



Q. What are the safety issues of concern to you with regard to truck and delivery drivers at precast plants?

A. Johnson: I believe the biggest area of concern is load securement. The product we haul is heavy and can be oversized. Loss of a load on a highway could create a catastrophic accident. Drivers need to make sure they are taking the time to secure their load correctly. It's our responsibility.

A. Smith: Vehicle inspections. We have a responsibility to the public to put a safe vehicle on the road. Taking the time to conduct a thorough daily inspection could save a life, eliminate a citation that could be received in a DOT roadside inspection and prolong the life of the vehicle. Our drivers receive quarterly training on conducting vehicle inspections, and each month three drivers are randomly selected and evaluated on how they complete their daily vehicle inspections.

A. Landis: The biggest safety concerns I have are other drivers on the road and job site conditions. Many people do not realize the weight of our vehicle loads and the distance required to safely stop them. Our field operations require that drivers regularly drive near/around excavations, other equipment, workers and other obstacles. Drivers need to be aware at all times for these additional hazards; awareness is the key to safe operation.

A. Kew: The biggest safety concerns are weights to be transported, access to job sites and excavation hazards.

A. Parkhurst: Of the many safety issues facing drivers today, the first and foremost concern is other drivers. Most drivers are unaware of how difficult it is to maneuver a large truck carrying a heavy load. Second in priority would be cell phone usage and its inherent dangers; in fact, the use of cell phones while driving has become one of the main causes of accidents in the country. Thirdly would be getting in and out of a cab and off and on the vehicle (bed); there are many injuries sustained from these activities.



Q. Do you monitor the locations of your trucks with GPS? Is cell phone use monitored?

A. Landis: We do not use GPS locators on vehicles, but cell phone use is monitored with DriveCam systems. Although DriveCam only captures video of driver actions when triggered, it is a good tool for recognizing driver cell phone use in addition to other unsafe driving habits.

A. Parkhurst: Most companies do not allow cell phone usage and have strict rules pertaining to violations of these policies. There are more and more companies utilizing GPS technology in their fleets. GPS technology is one of the best risk tools to help with your commercial auto loss control program.

Q. Do your drivers use cell phones, text messaging and/or radios for communication when they are on the road? Do you have a policy for cell phone use while driving?

A. Smith: Our drivers use cell phones/direct connects. We have a policy that allows for use of the cell phone/direct connect only when existing road, traffic and weather conditions safely allow it. Text messaging, instant messaging and other social media are prohibited.

A. Landis: The only time drivers are allowed to use cell phones/radios per our policy is when the vehicle is stopped. Drivers will check in with the dispatch department prior to leaving a job site to let the manager know the work is done and they are on the way back to the plant.

A. Parkhurst: Cell phone or radio usage policies are a must-have for precast companies. The Commercial Auto Fleet is one of the main areas that large claims occur in a precast operation, and one of the top reasons for new commercial auto claims is cell phone usage.

Q. What driver injuries have you experienced?

A. Parkhurst: Most driver injuries that are not related to major accidents are muscle injuries related to the neck and back.

A. Smith: Slip/fall injuries would be the most common – drivers getting in and out of the cab incorrectly, or on/off the trailer incorrectly, resulting in lacerations and strains. Also push/pull type injuries, and drivers using the winch bar incorrectly and handling the weight of the chains incorrectly.

A. Landis: Fortunately, driver injuries are rare. We have experienced one injury when a driver fell off of the trailer tongue while attempting to walk across it. The safe decision would have been to descend down the ladder on the vehicle, then walk to the trailer and climb up the ladder onto the bed. Unfortunately, the driver in this situation chose a shortcut and walked across the trailer tongue to access the trailer. He slipped and fell. There are the occasional bruise and scrape injuries as well.

A. Kew: Injuries over the past 19 years have consisted of bruises, scrapes and muscle pulls.

Q. Why are drivers sometimes injured getting in and out of the vehicle cab or when loading/unloading product?

A. Smith: Three-point entry/exit rules: A driver should use both hands and watch footing when entering/exiting the cab or using the ladder to get on/off the trailer. A driver should also scan the ground he is exiting onto. Often times there are holes, loose gravel, mud and other debris at job sites that could cause a driver to be injured if exiting the cab incorrectly.

A. Landis: Injuries entering and exiting the cab could come from a variety of conditions. In our experience, inattention to surroundings and shortcuts has caused slips/falls. Injuries from unloading products could be caused from inattention as well (standing on the opposite side of the vehicle while being unloaded, throwing chains and unhooking chains).

A. Kew: I feel drivers become injured due to inattention to surroundings. Often times there are uneven walking surfaces that could potentially create ankle injuries and wet or slippery surfaces that could cause a fall. Drivers need to be aware of hazards around them.

A. Parkhurst: Most of these injuries are due to lack of attention on proper body positioning as well as trying to do too much too fast. Drivers have large expectations placed on them to deliver product in difficult situations in very short windows.

Q. What is the best safety policy with regard to drivers?

A. Landis: Driver awareness is extremely critical as well as compliance with company policies and state law.

A. Kew: Following company policies and procedures.

A. Parkhurst: Following specific policies and procedures and never allowing anything to take the place of safe operating techniques.

Q. What type of safety training do you offer to your drivers?

A. Landis: Our drivers attend the new-hire safety orientation and are tested annually on driving skills with a road test. Crane operators are required to pass a written test as well as demonstrate the skills needed to safely operate the crane. In addition to crane skills and driving tests, we offer OSHA 10-hour training, excavation awareness training and regular safety meetings (toolbox topics) to our drivers.

A. Smith: All drivers attend a new-hire safety orientation, which starts on Day 1 and lasts for two days in the classroom. This training includes information on driver wellness and health, fatigue, HOS¹ regulations, load securement, crane operation, MVR² standards, defensive driving, accident response/reporting and CSA 2010.³ All drivers then participate in two-week, on-the-job training. This includes training with a mentor in all aspects of product recognition, safe operation of a vehicle/crane, safe loading, securing and hauling, and unloading. We do monitor vehicle location with GPS.

A. Parkhurst: There are many safety programs available and a combination of them has proven to be most successful as different people learn in different ways. These programs include:

- On-the-job
- Driving road tests
- Classroom

• Routinely scheduled safety meetings

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References

¹ Global Positioning Systems use satellites, computers and receivers to determine latitude and longitude of receiver

² DriveCam is a proprietary camera system for recording onboard vehicle video events.

³ Hours of Service <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rules-regulations/truck-driver/hos/hos-faqs.asp>

⁴ Motor Vehicle Record, regulated by state Departments of Motor/Vehicle Registration

⁵ Comprehensive Safety Analysis, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration <http://csa2010.fmcsa.dot.gov/>