Cargo Transporters Reduces Crashes and Successfully Defends Against Accident Claims with Critical Event Recording Data

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— Jerry Waddell, Safety Director, Cargo Transporters

In 2009, more than 60,000 large trucks were involved in injury crashes and more than 3,000 large trucks were involved in fatal crashes¹. The average cost of an injury accident involving a medium/ heavy truck is $330,000². If there is a fatality, the average cost skyrockets to over $3 million.

Driving safety is an important issue on today’s roads and highways. According to a 2009 study conducted by the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI) and funded by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), the implementation of driving behavior management systems using in-vehicle telematics devices can result in a significant reduction in the number of risky driving behaviors.

“Like any other carrier, we have accidents,” says Jerry Waddell, safety director of Cargo Transporters (Cargo), headquartered in Claremont, North Carolina. “But, we are proactive about driver safety and risk management and give our drivers tools to help them be as safe as possible on the road.”

One of the tools in Cargo’s safety arsenal is Critical Event Reporting (CER) application, which it implemented across its fleet of 450 trucks in December 2008.

¹ FMCSA Large Truck and Bus Crash facts 2009: Early release
² FMCSA’s 2008 Crash Cost Figures
**Cargo’s Story: Improved Safety & Reduced Costs**

**Challenges**
- Critical event-related accidents
- Overall accident-related costs

**Goals**
- Reduce hard braking and stability control events
- Easily identify high-risk drivers
- Get drivers home safely every trip
- Develop better “one-on-one” relationships with our drivers
- To open the lines of communication without the fear of reprimand if at all possible

**Solution**
- Critical Event Reporting to support proactive safety measures

**Benefits**
- Improved driver performance
- Proactive safety management
- Reduced the number of critical events
- Improved operational efficiency
- Reduced accident liability expenses
- Reduced overall severity of the accident itself

**Results**
- DOT accident free for 36 million miles
- Cleared of liability in two accidents, saving countless dollars in associated time and expenses

“We didn’t start monitoring critical events for disciplinary reasons; we did so because we don’t like critical events, period,” says Waddell. “These critical events if not addressed will indeed eventually lead to rear-end crashes, a loss of control or an over turn accident.”

“We knew that reducing critical events would lead to a reduction in the severity of accidents and we were confident CER would help us do that,” says Waddell. “It worked. We went nine months—36 million miles—without a major, DOT recordable accident.”

**Benefit of the Doubt for Drivers**

As part of its proactive safety efforts, Cargo uses Omnitracs’ web-based CER application to continuously monitor its fleet for hard braking, lane departure disabled warnings and roll stability. When CER detects an event, it sends a near real-time email alert to the safety team, as well as a message to the driver. “We know there are going to be critical events. We know there are times a driver has to hit the brakes or swerve in order to avoid a collision,” says Waddell.

“The first thing we do is bring the truck in for an inspection to eliminate any false reporting,” notes Waddell. “If the maintenance shop finds no fault with the truck, then the Safety Department will sit down with the driver to review his or her driving history and go over our safety policies.”

Cargo has found that just one safety review is usually all that is needed to see the driver’s behavior improve.

**Implementation, Modification & Acceptance**

Cargo implemented CER fleet-wide, all at once. It required virtually no upfront driver training and it was easy for the back-office team to learn. Waddell admits the first 30 days were pretty busy, answering lots of questions from drivers and trying to manage all of the alerts.

About one month after implementation, Cargo decided to customize the parameters of its hard braking event trigger and record only hard braking events that occur over 40 mph because, below that speed, the truck and cargo are more easily controlled and the few accidents they do see at those lower speeds do not cause significant damage or injury.

This customized parameter adjustment made the system more manageable for the fleet and safety managers and more realistic for the drivers. It significantly reduced the number of alerts, which made it easier for Cargo’s safety team to focus on the events associated with more critical situations.
“It was a very simple, logical change but it really improved our operational efficiency,” says Waddell. “At the same time, it showed the drivers that the safety team wasn’t going to use the CER service to micromanage them.”

The CER technology gives the safety team and the drivers themselves near real-time, objective visibility into their driving habits. Improved risk management and reduced accident liability are obviously important to Cargo, but, ultimately, the primary goal of all its safety measures is to make sure its drivers get home safely to their families.

Safe Driving Behavior: Attitude & Integrity

Cargo uses the CER data in fact-based one-on-one conversations with drivers as well as during weekly safety classes to support long-term performance improvement. The CER data is used as a tool to help drivers, not penalize them. We are using CER as a tool to turn a ‘questionable’ driver into a good driver and good drivers into better drivers,” says Waddell.

“The data has really helped get drivers to buy into the program and change their behaviors,” says Waddell.

To Waddell, a major indicator that this program has been successfully adopted is that he often gets calls from drivers as soon as an event happens.

“They say, ‘This system just told me I messed up—and I did.’ The CER monitoring has instilled integrity in our drivers. They use the alerts the same way we do: as near real-time, objective visibility into their driving habits. It’s made them more professional, accountable and safe,” says Waddell.

Jerry Waddell, Safety Director
Cargo Transporters

“The CER service wasn’t implemented to make the drivers happy, mad, sad or glad—it was implemented to make them safe,” emphasizes Waddell.
Cleared of Fault with CER Data

In addition to the benefits it has gained from improved driver safety, Cargo has also seen some eye-opening benefits in terms of reduced accident liability since it activated the CER application.

Since implementation in December 2008, Cargo has been able to provide CER data that helped to clear them of responsibility. Waddell was able to pull the CER data covering the five minutes before and two minutes after the accidents and the objective, fact-based data cleared both Cargo drivers of fault.

“It’s very powerful to be able to overlay a post-crash accident investigation over the hard braking or stability control event. The CER system has really been invaluable from an accident reconstruction and liability reduction standpoint. The data is always accurate and always objective and that’s so important when we’re in litigation over accidents.”
Cargo also used CER data to clear itself of liability against a claim for freight damage. The driver was accused of causing the load to shift but the CER data showed there had been neither hard braking nor stability control events during the trip that might have caused freight damage.

“The CER data has proved positive for us not only within the realm of safety, but for our overall operations and our customer service as well,” says Waddell. “The shipments entrusted to us should always arrive in good condition, in a timely manner, and the CER data is an important tool to assist us in the process. Without doubt, it has helped us save money, save time, and save lives,” says Waddell.
Critical Event Reporting helps you put the focus on safety.

CER is an automatic vehicle monitoring capability that enables safety and fleet managers to proactively manage the safety behavior of their drivers in near real-time. We know the negative impact that accidents can have on your business operations. Injuries, high costs, and legal liabilities can cripple a fleet. By continuously monitoring vehicles for critical safety-related events, CER helps prevent these accidents before they occur. CER can help ensure the safety of your fleet and drivers, which can mean lower insurance costs and reduced liability exposure for your company.

Our mobile computing platforms (MCP100, 110, 200) support the monitoring of hard-braking and manually triggered events. You can also easily integrate stability control systems from Bendix Commercial Vehicle Systems and Meritor WABCO, and lane departure warning systems by Iteris, Inc. to expand critical event monitoring capabilities for your fleet.

CER provides second-by-second sensor data ranging from five minutes before an event until two minutes afterward. This critical information includes driver/truck ID, time/date, position/location, hours-of-service compliance, and on-board vehicle sensor and device information such as parking brake status and vehicle speed. The application wirelessly transmits all of this data and then consolidates it into one central, web-based location on the CER Portal. Safety and fleet managers can then use this information to support a variety of proactive fleet safety efforts.

Critical Event Reporting delivers results:

• Helps you proactively manage driver behavior
• Helps you reduce critical events and accidents
• Enables you to capture evidence for accident and freight damage investigations
• Helps you honor fleet social responsibility for highway safety
• Works with you to preserve your fleet’s reputation for safety and customer service
ABOUT OMNITRACS, LLC

Omnitracs, LLC has provided integrated fleet management applications, services, and platforms to transportation and logistics companies around the world for 25 years. As the most experienced provider in the industry, Omnitracs delivers end-to-end solutions to help fleets improve safety and compliance, fuel management, mobile asset management, operational efficiency, driver retention, and customer service. It tailors fleet management solutions to meet the needs of for-hire and private fleet operations of all sizes and with requirements ranging from basic compliance management to the most sophisticated business intelligence. Omnitracs is uniquely positioned to innovate fleet management solutions that benefit from the company’s deep knowledge of mobile wireless technology and solutions. Backed by a global, 24/7, world-class technology infrastructure, Omnitracs has established an unrivaled track record of award-winning customer service that extends long past the initial sale. For more information, please visit the Omnitracs website (www.omnitracs.com), “Omnitracs Road Ahead” blog (www.omnitracs.com/blog) the YouTube Channel: Driving Ahead (www.omnitracs.com/youtube) and LinkedIn page (www.omnitracs.com/linkedin).