

# "PRAISE": Preventing Road Accidents and Injuries for the Safety of Employees

February  
**10**  
Fact Sheet  
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## ETSC interview with Suckling Transport



ETSC's PRAISE project, "Preventing Road Accidents and Injuries for the Safety of Employees" aims at mobilising knowledge needed to create work-related road safety leadership. The project will advance the awareness of the need for work-related road safety management and provide the know-how to employers who have to take on that challenge. It also aims to present the work-related road safety standards of road safety champions, by presenting employers' success stories, notably through the PRAISE Fact Sheets. This Fact Sheet complements the PRAISE Report "Fit for Road Safety: From Risk Assessment to Training" published in February 2010.

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## Suckling Transport Introduction

Suckling Transport has specialised in the transport of fuel by road since 1987 and delivers nearly two billion litres of inflammable liquid per year. It operates 65 articulated road tanker vehicles and employs 200 people in the UK. Normally vehicles operate in the livery of the customer concerned (e.g. Shell and Jet) or TankShare, which is a brand name used by Suckling Transport. The Company competes in a market sector dominated by large, multi-national companies such as DHL and Wincanton. To compete successfully, it must differentiate itself and road safety seems to be the perfect way to do this. Suckling Transport has therefore launched the Zero Incident Project (ZIP) in 2008.

Below is a photo of Peter Larner, Managing Director of Suckling Transport, presenting a cheque to Employee team captain Gordon Johnstone after the Scottish team reached one million kilometres without having an accident of any kind. The 1mKm Challenge has been an important part of the ZIP project and it allows employees to adopt a Charity

to whom Suckling Transport makes a donation whenever a team meets the 1mKm Challenge.

## Interview with Peter Larner, Managing Director, Suckling Transport

### Road Safety management at Suckling Transport

#### 1. What triggered your decision to take measures to improve road safety?

As the Managing Director I need to identify any serious risk to the future of the business. An issue such as cash flow, for example, is easily recognisable as a threat (but, fortunately, not for Suckling Transport). It occurred to me that, in a diminishing insurance market, the inability to obtain motor insurance cover would certainly pose such a threat. So a good safety record became a pre-requisite of our long-term business plan.

Through its project style of management, Suckling



Transport has received recognition for environmental best practice and for innovation. So launching the Zero Incident Project (ZIP) in 2008 seemed natural. This safety initiative began with a project team considering how the company might eliminate accidents, or crashes, completely. The three main areas examined by the project were technological developments, driver training and procedures.

All received wisdom militates against the concept of zero accidents. The British Standards Institute once said of me that I “enjoy going against the grain by turning people’s pre-conceptions on their head”. Achieving zero crashes is a pre-conception I cannot resist.

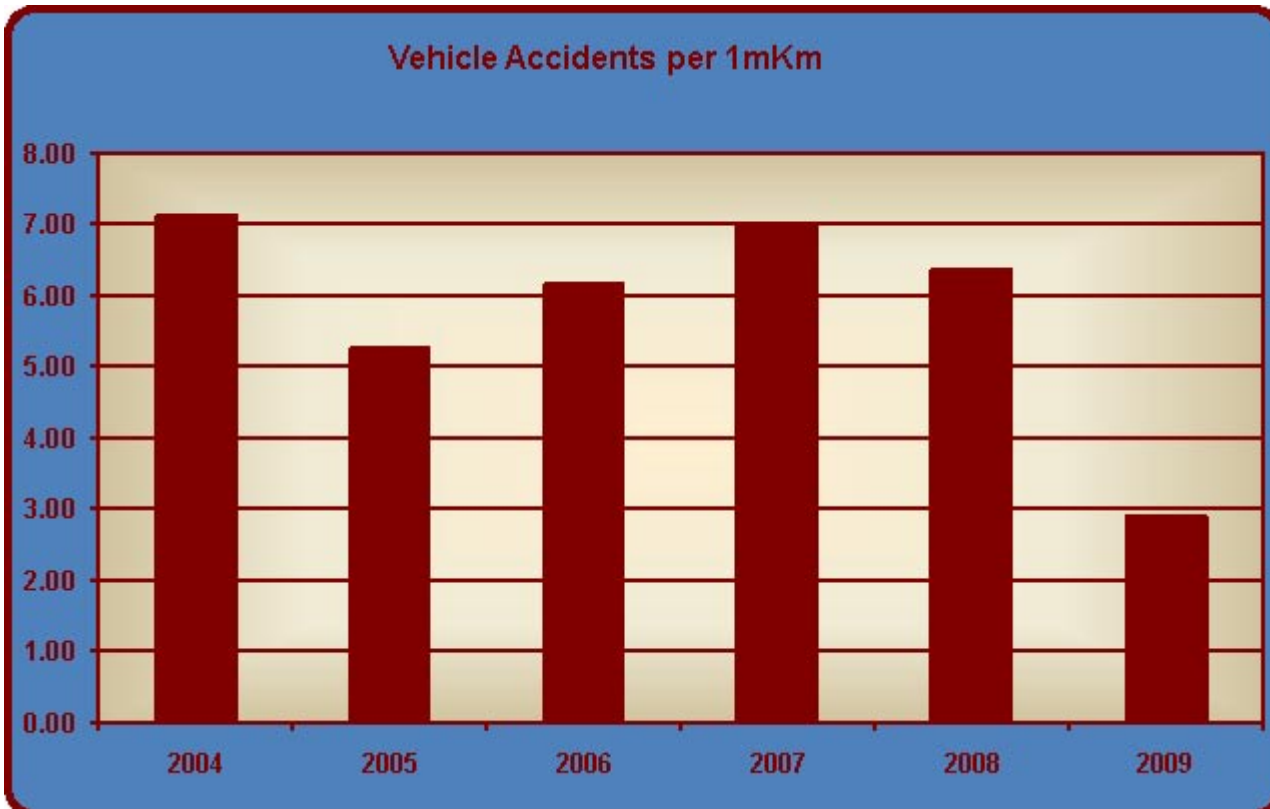
**2. In brief can you summarise your company’s road safety strategy?**

Suckling Transport places safety above everything else. We demonstrate this commitment and communicate it to the workforce in practical terms, by not compromising safety in any way. My role, as Managing Director, is to create a robust safety culture that is understood, and contributed to, by the workforce. It is important to recognise that it can only become a generative culture

if it is subscribed to by the workforce, rather than imposed on that workforce.

In practice, this involves minimising our employees’ exposure to risk through assessments, including full site and route risk assessments for every address we deliver to. The company supports this through a management regime that ensures compliance with regard to drivers’ hours regulations, speeding, use of mobile telephones and other issues that affect safety. It provides incentives to drivers to improve safety, holds driver toolbox talks and its managers conduct behavioural safety observations of drivers at work. We have effective methods for communicating safety to the workforce through our quarterly News Bulletin, the monthly Safety in Numbers newsletter and, more formally, through Health Safety and Environment committees, handbooks, policies and procedures. And, finally, we provide training to ensure our employees have the skills they need to perform their duties safely.

**3. Can you provide any figures tracking the improvements in your safety performance over the years?**



*Graph 1:  
Vehicle Accidents per  
Million Kilometers*

Graph 1 demonstrates the significant improvement in accident frequency in 2009. Between 2004 and 2008, the Company recorded between 5.2 and 7.1 accidents per 1 million kilometres. This average of 6.3 fell by over 50% in 2009 to below 2.9 accidents per 1 million kilometres.

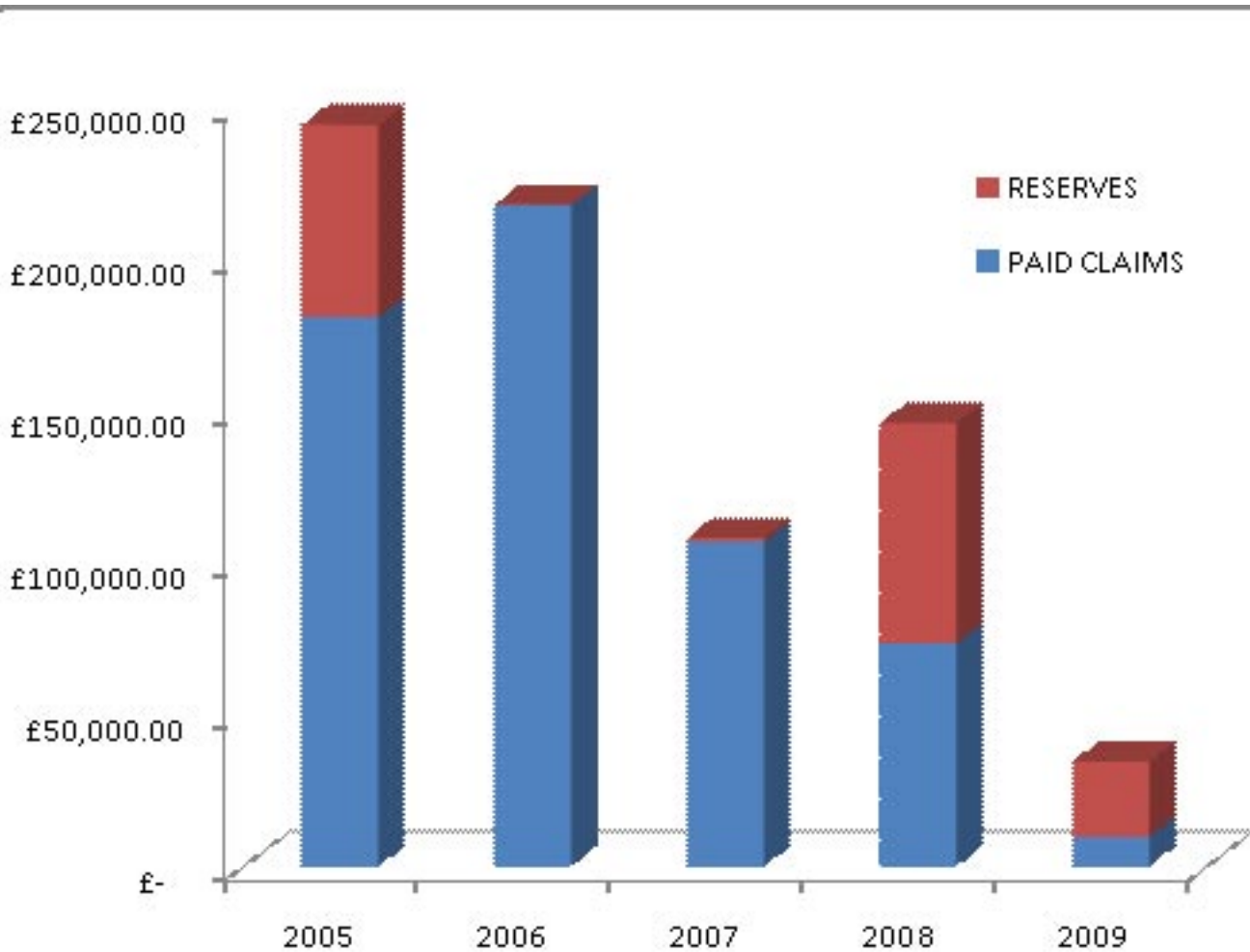
Graph 2 shows an 80% improvement in the severity of accidents. The average cost of motor vehicle insurance claims amounted to £180,850 per annum in the 4 years prior to 2009. Claims fell to just £34,437 in 2009.

**4. Did you establish contacts with any road safety organisation or hired consultants to develop your road safety policies?**

We have received very good advice over the years from our customers – Shell, ConocoPhillips, and other major oil companies. We have never enlisted the help of consultants but the safety organisation Brake has been extremely helpful, particular one of its advisers, Dr Will Murray. On-line guidance from organisations like RoadSafe is also useful and we are signatories to the EU Road Safety Charter.

**5. How is your road safety management organised (for example is there one person**

*Graph 2: cost of motor vehicle insurance claims*





**dedicated entirely to road safety, or is this part of some executive’s list of duties?)**

We have a Safety Manager and assistant, but safety needs to be led by the Managing Director, in order that its status is understood by all employees. It is important that I share the safety duties of our management team, by giving safety talks and communicating effectively with the drivers.

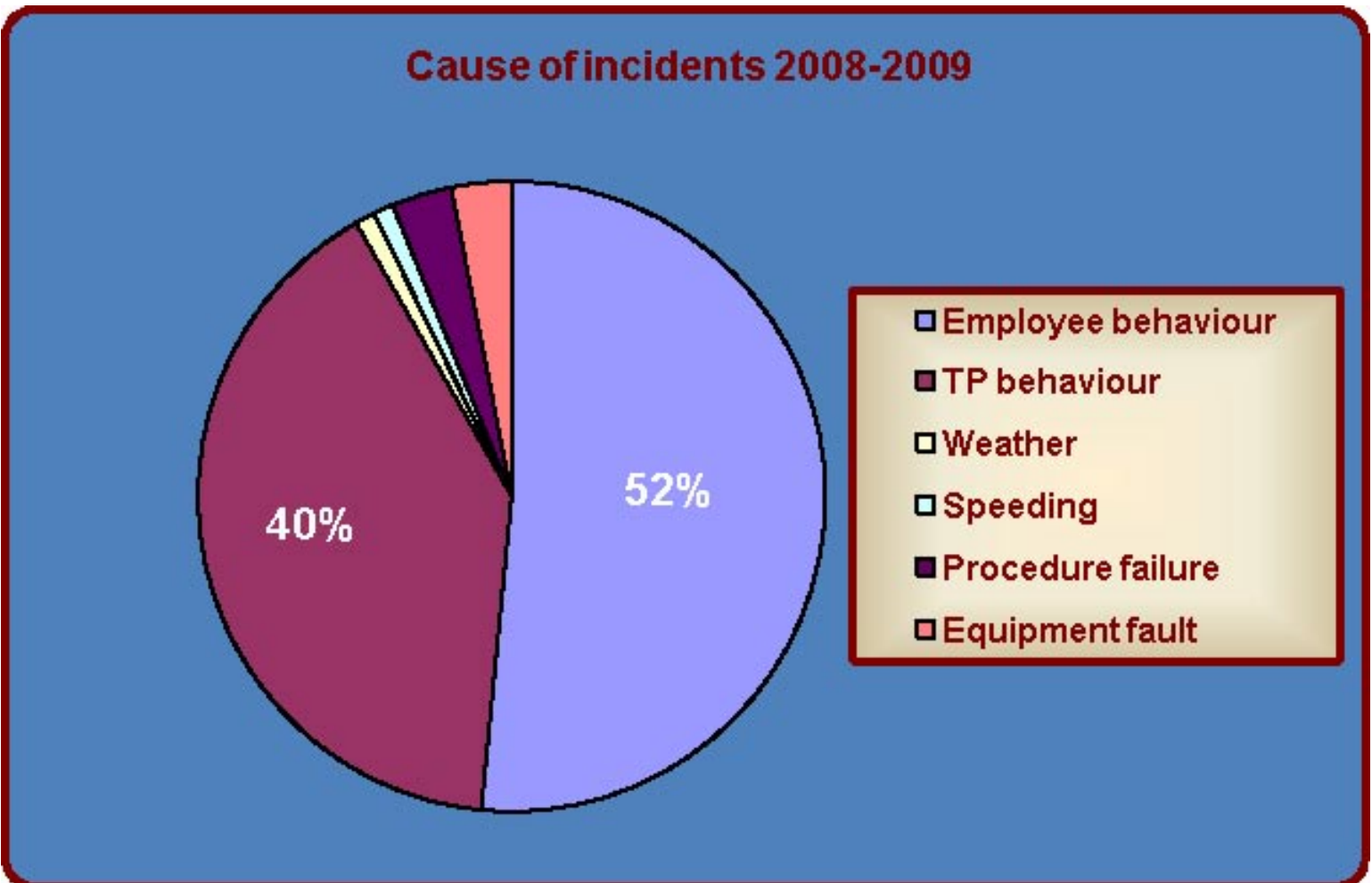
**6. What is the leading cause of collisions in your operations?**

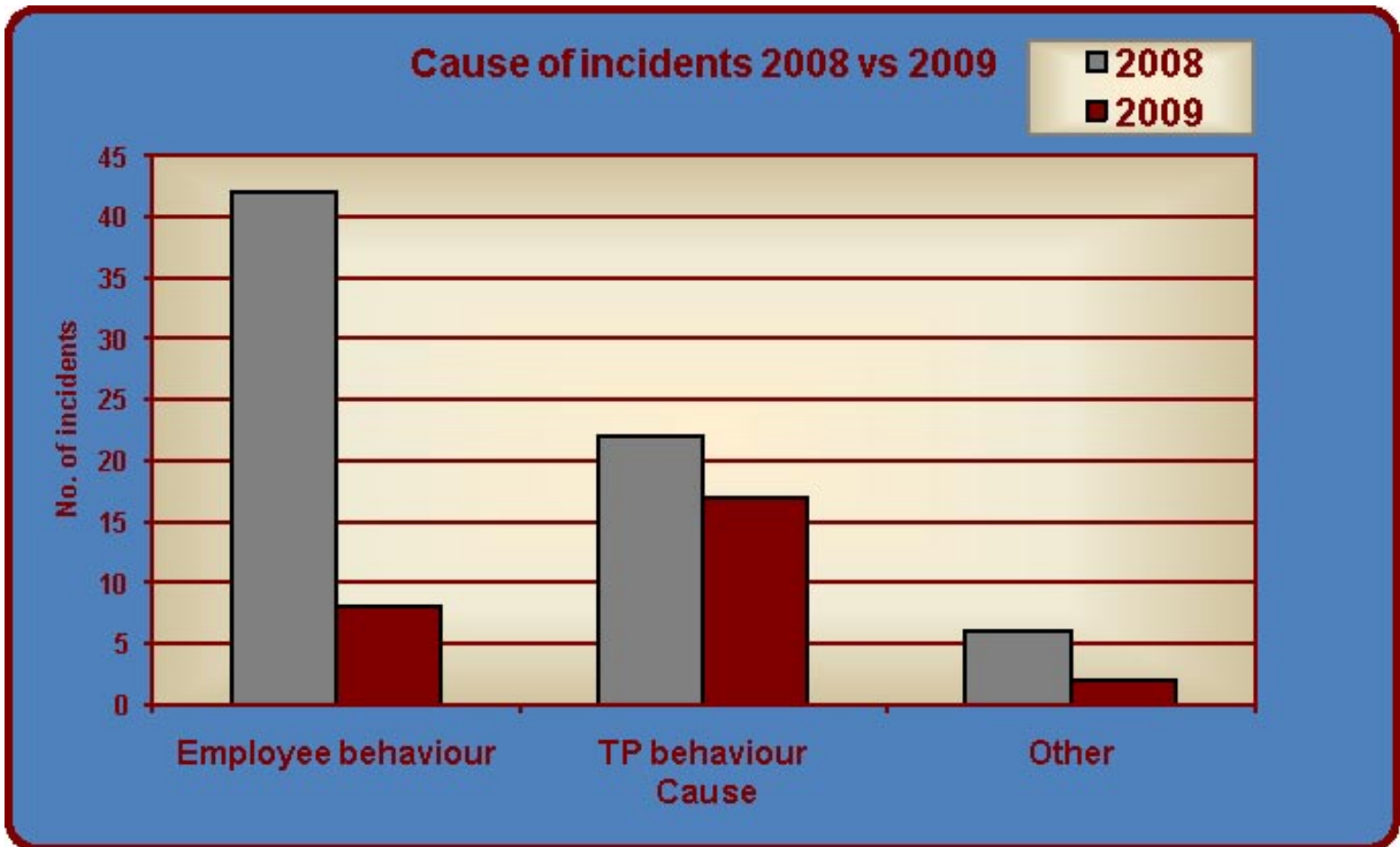
Accident investigations are a source of information that leads to corrective action which, in turn, reduces accident frequency. It is important, therefore, that we record all incidents, including zero cost incidents.

The leading causes of collisions are our own driver behaviour and that of the third party. Speeding is a rare occurrence in our company and, as such, where it contributes to an accident we record it separately from driver behaviour. It is considered a wilful act rather than, say, a misjudgement on the part of our driver. We have done a considerable amount of work in recent years to reduce the impact of speeding and fatigue, and we have significantly reduced the need for reversing manoeuvres on sites, so these now represent a small proportion of causal factors.

Graph 3 shows the proportion of incidents by cause. The number of incidents in each cause fell in 2009, as demonstrated in Graph 4, with the most significant fall in accidents resulting from our own drivers’ behaviour. This was the result of the changes made to our training methods.

*Graph 3: cause of incidents 2008-2009*





*Graph 4: cause of incidents 2008 vs 2009*

**7. How did you come to that conclusion (how do you collect the data)?**

Every incident is investigated to establish the root cause. Methods of establishing root cause have improved in the last year too. Stopping at driver behaviour or third party behaviour has been replaced by a search for the cause behind that conclusion. It will be interesting to see how our view of causes changes as our skill in detecting root causes improves. The information we record is reconciled with a monthly claims history sent to us by our insurers.

**8. Do you think that transport companies have a duty to go even further than the legislation framework regarding traffic safety of the country in which they operate?**

Yes, I do; without doubt. Legislation provides the minimum standard required. If Suckling Transport is to differentiate itself from its competitors then it must go beyond that minimum standard. A safety culture based on the minimum standard lacks ambition and sends completely the wrong message to the workforce.

**9. What do you think should be the starting point of a company that wishes to do that?**

We need to analyse risks and seek out ways of eliminating those risks, as we did with our Zero Incident Project. Raising standards, such as increasing the frequency of driver medicals to improve fitness to drive procedures, can result in increased costs. For a company of our size these are decisions we need to take. Even if Suckling Transport was the cheapest option, potential customers would not believe it. DHL

or Wincanton would always be perceived as the lower cost option. So we can never compete on price. We can only compete on service and safety levels and, to do that, we must aspire to be the best. Raising the bar at frequent intervals is part of that process.

## The Business Case

### **1. Have you calculated the financial benefits resulting from your investments in road safety in terms of the avoidance of collisions and casualties? Maybe in terms of fuel saved / vehicle maintenance or repair costs saved / fewer insurance claims or lower premiums?**

It is essential to demonstrate the cost v benefit case to shareholders. The cost of accidents should reflect both the actual cost and the possible cost had the full potential of some incidents been realised. Failing to address the rising cost of insurance claims could result in a company becoming uninsurable and drive it into liquidation.

The cost of safety related items is often quite small. The on-board computers and other equipment fitted to our trucks improve safety but also improve fuel consumption. Only a few items, such as reversing aids, refer solely to safety.

The best way of demonstrating the financial benefits of the ZIP initiative, which included our new approach to driver training, is through data on the cost of accident claims provided by our Insurers. This is shown in the graph above (graph 2) and reveals a substantial reduction in claim costs in 2009. Last year motor insurance premiums amounted to £237,000. We expect to see a reduction in those costs this year.

### **2. Do you feel that your customers are reassured by knowing that you have**

### **strong safety standards? And how do you communicate that to your customers?**

Most certainly. Major oil companies expect the highest level of safety from their contractors. Our customers conduct regular, and intensive, safety audits to ensure we perform at the highest level.

### **3. How do you feel that your safety policies fit in with your other concerns (environment / quality assurance / company turnover)?**

It is a misconception that companies need to 'trade off' other concerns against safety. Those responsible for delivering a quality service in our organisation must do that whilst fully complying with our safety policy and procedures. There is a temptation for individuals to place expediency over safety; to defer a safety inspection on equipment in order to meet a delivery. It is essential that everyone in our organisation understands that any such action will be punished, rather than rewarded. The 'profit' achieved through a service success can never compensate for a 'loss' incurred through a safety incident. This needs to be at the core of the company's safety culture.

### **4. Will you consider adopting the upcoming ISO 39001 certificate on road safety management? This standard should be published by ISO in 2011 and will be of relevance for any company involved in road transport and wishing to receive an international certification for good road safety standards.**

Yes, we certainly will be talking to Worldwide Quality Assurance about ISO39001. We are registered to ISO9001:2008 and to BS EN 12798, which provides a safety standard specifically for transport companies carrying dangerous goods. We intend to examine the benefits of supplementing or replacing BS EN 12798 with ISO39001.

## Driver Training

### 1. What are the main elements of your company's driver training activities?

Apart from specific training such as manual handling or the legislative requirements for the training of LGV drivers (CPC) and, in particular, drivers of dangerous goods vehicles (ADR), the Company's training provision was historically based on a periodic driving assessment every two years. Drivers were subjected to an in-cab assessment by a colleague, who had been externally trained by the Freight Transport Association. Corrective training was then provided.

In 2009 Suckling Transport fitted on-board computers that could provide information on the skills of the driver, both in terms of safety and fuel efficiency. This made 'intervention' training, rather than periodic training, possible. We then selected six drivers to become our team of Driver Instructors. They attended a one-week course which was provided by Smiths Systems, a US organisation that specialises in this field. The Instructors were then equipped with mobile telephones and laptop computers so that they could receive reports from the on-board computers and communicate with other members of the team about correcting any skill deficiencies they found. The on-board computers are also used to identify corrective actions from post-incident investigations.

### 2. What motivated you to start?

The new technology identified in the ZIP initiative convinced us that 'intervention' training should replace the 'periodic' training methods of the past. This enables us to target training more effectively.

### 3. Did you involve your employees/drivers in taking the decision to invest

### into driver training? If yes, how?

Senior shop stewards and driver HSE representatives were consulted throughout the process. Once the Driver Instructor team was formed, further consultation took place with them. Demonstrations were also provided to the new Instructor team by Driver Trainers from the manufacturers of the trucks we used – MAN and DAF - and the makers of the on-board computers RTL, to ensure that our new Instructors had an in-depth knowledge of the trucks and the equipment on board.

### 4. What has been the opinion of the drivers? Are they supportive?

The drivers have been very supportive of the changes. We had always provided quarterly toolbox talks at each operating centre and attendance had been good. However, after consulting with the workforce, it was decided that the content of these talks should be changed from the more philosophical discussions that had taken place about road safety in general, to more practical discussions, where we discussed actual accidents and near misses. Our new training plans stemmed from these discussions.

Early in the ZIP initiative, we identified that the main reason why our accident frequency levels had not improved for several years was that we were, in reality, victims of our own success. The fewer accidents we had, the fewer opportunities we had to take corrective action. Paradoxically, the reason we had seen such good improvement up until 2005 was because we had experienced so many accidents and had a constant source of active and latent causes that enabled us to take corrective action.

In order to ensure this source of information continued, we incentivised drivers to submit near miss and potential incident reports. Before doing this, I consulted with individual drivers to try to establish why they were reluctant to submit such reports. The answer was simple: it involved them



in extra duties, they saw little tangible benefit from the process and feedback had been poor when they did submit such reports.

We therefore simplified the PIR (potential incident report) card and improved the feedback to the drivers. More importantly, I asked the drivers to imagine a world where they would be driving along and an audible message would be given in the cab of the vehicle to alert the driver that he, or she, was approaching an accident black spot, or some other hazard. This would be possible, I explained, because we had the technology but, more importantly, because a colleague of theirs would have submitted details of the hazard on a potential incident report. This demonstration of the benefits of risk identification and communication was a catalyst to securing the co-operation we needed. In 2009 we received over 300 near miss and potential incident reports from drivers and we can now start turning them into static or dynamic data for the new audible warning system for drivers.

**5. How did you choose which type of training was best suited to your needs?**

Our General Manager and Safety Manager looked at a number of defensive driver training systems. We had previously used the Freight Transport Association (FTA) and still use this organisation for other services. However, we decided to implement the Smiths System, which involved an instructor in the system travelling to our head office from the United States to spend one week with our Instructor team. Apart from the training itself, the week that the Instructors spent together at a hotel near head office was a great team-building experience too.

**6. Have you been able to measure the improvement resulting from such activities?**



*The Smiths System Training Team*

The Zero Incident Project was largely driven by a failure to improve our accident frequency record since 2004. We saw a significant improvement in both frequency and severity following ZIP (See Graph 1 and 2). Many of the elements of ZIP were rolled out progressively, so we are continuing to see an improvement.

## **7. What have been the lessons learnt and what would you advise to other companies considering going forward with this sort of practices?**

None of the practical aspects of ZIP, or the change in the provision of driver training, would have been successful without the foundation of a strong safety culture. You would not build a house, without first building the foundations.

When Suckling Transport was awarded contracts with Shell and ConocoPhillips, 100 and 40 drivers transferred respectively, under TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment regulations), with the contracts. It was several years before the workforce believed that we genuinely placed safety above service. Drivers are naturally anxious to keep the end customer satisfied, by completing the delivery in spite of obstacles and adversity. They link service with the retention of the business and with job security. Only by demonstrating, in practical terms, that it must always be safe to do so, can our safety culture prevail. So be patient, build a platform; a good idea, on its own, is not enough.

### **Other Matters**

#### **1. Are there any problems that persist despite the measures that you have taken? If yes how do you plan to tackle them?**

Accidents result from a combination of latent and active causes. Active causes are frequently the result of behavioural failings on the part of the driver. It is important to understand the role

of training in this process.

When a new driver joins the Company, he or she is in a state of unconscious incompetence (they do not know that they are in need of training). Once training begins, they become consciously incompetent (by recognising that they require training). After training has been provided they move to a state of conscious competence and, hopefully, through refresher training, remain in that state throughout their employment.

Unfortunately, through an attitude promoted by complacency an individual can regress. As an example, a driver conducting his, or her, daily vehicle check finds no defects over a sustained period. Eventually, the individual mistakenly concludes that such checks are unnecessary because the risk level is low, and so they either cease the practice, or become less diligent until an accident occurs.

Addressing this problem is the key to achieving our aim of zero incidents because, only through pro-active measures, will we eliminate accidents completely. On-the-job behavioural safety observations by managers is just one of the processes we are introducing to achieve this aim.

#### **2. Do you foresee actions to tackle risk factors that are more difficult to detect, (for example regarding driver's fitness to drive: fatigue/ drugs/ health problems...)?**

Suckling Transport has introduced both random and 'with cause' drugs and alcohol testing and we randomly check 10% of the workforce each year. We subject our drivers to a medical every 2.5 years and annually for those aged over sixty.

We have Occupational Health Advisers and a regime of checking fitness to drive (a) on recruitment, (b) every 2.5 years (c) post-incident, (d) after 3 absences in any rolling year and (e) after any prolonged absence.

If fitness to drive is found to be a contributing

factor in the future we would increase the parameters used in this process - for example: by changing (d) to 2 absences.

**3. Are there any particular in-vehicle safety equipment that you have fitted your vehicles with or wish to fit them with? If yes why, and how do you / will you monitor the use of such equipment?**

Our Zero Incident Project included trials of 14 items of safety equipment. Some of these referred to tank and hose fittings, but many were generic items used on the tractor unit. These included: Object sensor on cab, reversing aid on trailer, lane departure warning system and vehicle stability control. These were monitored as part of the project and drivers and customers were consulted on their suitability. Those adopted were either fitted retrospectively or specified on any future trucks. Those rejected were simply recorded as such in the project control document.

**4. Does your route planning take road safety into consideration? For example how do you ensure that delivery schedules do not pressure drivers to speed / do you consider what is the safest /shortest route (maybe through satellite navigation ) etc.?**

A site and route risk assessment document is created for each delivery point. These are kept on a database at head office and a file containing the documents is kept at each operating centre.

At present, speed compliance is manually checked by managers as part of our Journey Management procedures. These include (a) random checks of tachograph speeds against local speed limits, (b) checks that rest breaks are not being taken whilst deliveries are made and (c) safe havens are used where a break is necessary. We are currently working with the suppliers of our on-board

computers to introduce a number of changes. The first will create automatic checks for speed compliance by the system. I understand that this can be done every two minutes. The second will involve the geo-fencing of accident black spots, and other hazards, to provide an audible warning to drivers.

ETSC would like to thank Peter Larner, Managing Director of Suckling Transport, for his precious contribution.

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## PRAISE Fact Sheets

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