**Early Reporting of Collisions and Subsequent Collision Investigation**

# Introduction

Fleet operators are often faced with rising accident claims costs that take up much of their time and resources to manage and settle. Many fleet operators achieve the fastest and most direct impact on the reduction of claims costs by improving the speed of accident reporting across their businesses.

If a company driver has an accident and fails to notify their manager and in turn their vehicle insurer immediately, the third party involved in the accident will often have been contacted by a credit hire company and provided with a replacement vehicle that starts a process that can lead to fraudulently high vehicle repair costs and replacement vehicle hire costs.

Therefore, improved accident reporting is of paramount importance to directly manage claims costs.

# Why can claims costs be so excessive?

If one of your drivers is responsible for a collision with a third party vehicle, the third party driver, who is a non-fault driver, will wish to remain mobile and continue to have a vehicle to drive. They will not want to pay to hire a vehicle whilst theirs is off the road for repair, so they use the services of a credit hire company to keep them on the road.

The service provided by credit hire companies provides a replacement vehicle to the non-fault driver and they can also offer to repair their damaged vehicle, but all on credit. This is greatly appealing to non-fault drivers as the idea is that they will not pay the claims costs because their claim against the at fault drivers’ policy, i.e. your company motor fleet policy, will cover the vehicle credit hire and repair costs.

A number of UK motor insurers have signed an agreement with a large number of credit hire companies in order to set out an agreed way of working that manages the costs of the vehicle hire and repair process. However, not all credit hire

companies have signed this agreement and a number of these businesses are accused of fraudulently increasing the cost of the claims by:

1. Providing a replacement vehicle that is much larger and more expensive than necessary and hiring out the car for much longer than necessary.
2. Charging excessive fees for storing the damaged vehicle.
3. Charging far too much for repairing the original vehicle.
4. Making repair work spin out over weeks to justify the excessive hire and storage costs.

The key issue for businesses operating a fleet is therefore to attempt to keep the credit hire companies out of any situation where an insured driver hits a third party vehicle.

# Taking Action

The best way to reduce credit hire costs and therefore claims costs is not to have a collision in the first place. The majority of incidents that result in claims involve an insured driver hitting the vehicle in front in the rear. So, drivers need reminding to focus on the road ahead and not be distracted when driving, to observe road speed signs and keep a sensible distance between them and the vehicle in front.

However, collisions do happen from time to time and all businesses should have a process of data recording and reporting that allows their insurer to contact the non fault driver as soon as possible within hours of the collision to offer help in repairing their vehicle. If this process is effective it will result in the damaged third party vehicle being repaired in an economic manner by the insurer without the involvement of a credit hire company. Any delay in the reporting process will mean the higher the risk of a credit hire company contacting the third party driver.

It is of vital importance for businesses to adopt an Accident Reporting framework that all drivers and managers fully understand and are well briefed on the need to report all collisions immediately after they occur or within a few hours on the day of the incident.

Whilst businesses can adopt a variety of measures to improve fleet risk management and reduce accident frequencies, improving accident reporting times to reduce and ultimately avoid any involvement by credit hire companies is a cost effective and simple way to make a significant impact on reducing claims costs. Providing drivers with the necessary instructions and framework to follow in the event of an accident has paid dividends for many businesses in helping manage their motor fleet insurance costs.

The Fleet Safety Academy gives you the template forms and training material necessary to help you quickly train your drivers in what steps to take at the scene of an accident and develop your early reporting of collisions approach.

# Collision Investigation

One definition of a traffic accident is “ that occurrence in a series of events which usually produces injury, death or property damage.” (1). We refer to road traffic accidents as collisions in the belief that many of the collisions that occur could have been avoided and are therefore not accidents.

The objectives of a collision investigation are to determine:

1. What happened, what type of collision took place
2. Where the collision occurred
3. When the collision occurred
4. Why the collision occurred e.g. vehicle defect, obstruction on road, weather conditions etc.
5. Who was involved in the collision

Thorough collision investigation should provide a logical sequence of enquiry that pieces together the key causes to provide analysis and conclusion of the event. Elements of an accident investigation include:

1. Scene of Accident Investigation and data collection – this is the most important part of the investigation process upon which all other elements of the investigation depend
2. Follow up – the scene of accident investigation has limits in terms of information gathering and additional key details are required including witness statements, statements from the injured parties where possible, vehicle examinations and tracing the movements of vehicles, pedestrians, details of weather conditions, and all other useful external issues prior to the accident
3. Accident cause analysis – following completion of gathering information and reconstruction of the accident, the cause of the accident can be presented and finalized
4. Driver debrief – a discussion of the findings of the investigation with the driver involved and the development of an action plan to help ensure that the driver is not involved in another collision

Through the gathering of a wide range of information on the collision, the investigator can begin to make assessments regarding the:

1. Cause of the accident
2. Who was to blame for the accident
3. Action points to prevent a recurrence of the collision

They will also be able to meet the requirements for completing the accident report and assisting with providing information for accident prevention programmes.

Following the At Scene information gathering process the investigator must ensure that the accident is thoroughly assessed and the cause found, this maybe completed themselves or other involved parties, who should report into the investigator.

# Qualities needed for Accident Investigation

A good accident investigator needs to have the following key qualities to be able to carry out their duties effectively:

1. Have a good aptitude for the investigation process and a desire to prevent accidents recurring
2. Hold good basic knowledge of accident causes, investigation methods and techniques.
3. Ideally, experience in the field of accident investigation
4. Be prepared to continue improving their expertise and knowledge of the investigation process.

1. Rivers RW, Traffic Accident Investigators Manual, 2nd Edition, Charles C Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 1995.

# Collision Reporting and Investigation Process

|  |
| --- |
| **Provide instructions to your drivers on the process for reporting accidents and provide a scene of accident information exchange form for each vehicle.**   * Train your managers and drivers on early reporting of collision procedures * Adapt the scene of collision information exchange form to include your claims handlers contact details   + Issue the scene of information exchange form to your vehicles * Use the scene of accident checklist document to gather the necessary data |
| **Use the collision investigation form once the collision has been reported.**  **Make use of the collision investigation question set.** |
| **Use the witness statement form and data management form to manage the investigation data.** |
| **Carry out a post investigation de brief with the driver and record the action plan necessary to present a recurrence.** |
| **Use an accident review committee to review collisions when the cause of the incident is difficult to determine.** |
| Collision Management Copyright © 2019 The Fleet Safety Academy t/a Northern Star Risk Management Limited. **3** |