

# For SAFETY'S sake

Fleet operators UK-wide are involved in an almost bewildering variety of initiatives to make their employees and the vehicles they drive safer, writes Steve Banner

One safety improvement plan came from employees, rather than managers. GASP - the Go-Ahead Safety Pledge - has its roots in an annual employee competition to find the best ways to reduce risk, run by bus operator Go-Ahead London for the past 17 years. That wider scheme involves all 16 of its garages plus its joint training departments, explains engineering director, Richard Harrington.

"We come up with a risk-related theme, then inform all of the participating departments what it is, then they have a month to come up with a team of up to six people to create a safety campaign based around it," he continues.

At a gala dinner, first, second and third prizes are awarded. Many of the ideas generated by the competition are excellent, he says, and make a significant contribution to improving safety. Nor are they necessarily complicated or expensive to implement.

One of them involved painting a white line on the garage floor and fixing a number plate to a wall a suitable distance away. If drivers can't read the number plate when standing on the line, then they should go and get their eyes tested to ensure that they are safe to drive. The plate is changed every so often to prevent employees from memorising it.



Another idea was to paint yellow footprints on the ground to indicate the safe route to the garage's reception area. Follow the footprints and there is less risk of wandering into a vehicle movement area. The ideas that are implemented are not always the ones that win first prize, but the ones that are most practical, Harrington says.

Turning to GASP, he explains how it came about. "Back in 2017 we were pursuing a hearts-and-minds theme, and a team at our Peckham garage decided to conduct a special survey," he recalls. It revealed that, among other things, too few employees were wearing high-visibility vests in areas of the depot where they were required, and too many drivers were failing to obey the speed limit. The upshot was the Peckham Pledge; an undertaking by the garage's employees that they would follow safe working practices at all times.

The company thought it was such a good idea that its health and

safety committee brought together a group of employees including drivers and technicians, along with union representatives, with the aim of developing a company-wide voluntary pledge. It became GASP, and now covers areas such as work-life balance, passenger safety, personal attitudes in the workplace and site and bus safety and security. It has won the support of Transport for London and trade union Unite. All accompanying literature, including the pledge form itself, bears Unite as well as Go-Ahead logos.

Harrington and Go-Ahead London's managing director John Trayner were the first two pledgers back in March 2018. Some 6,500 of their colleagues - upwards of 90% of the workforce - have followed their lead, with more joining every week. "All new recruits are encouraged to sign it," Harrington says.

A so-called GASP-ometer is displayed at all garages detailing the number of pledgers, and every employee who is



a signatory receives a lapel badge. In recognition of the role social media plays today, GASP hashtags are being used to encourage feedback and to highlight examples of good practice.

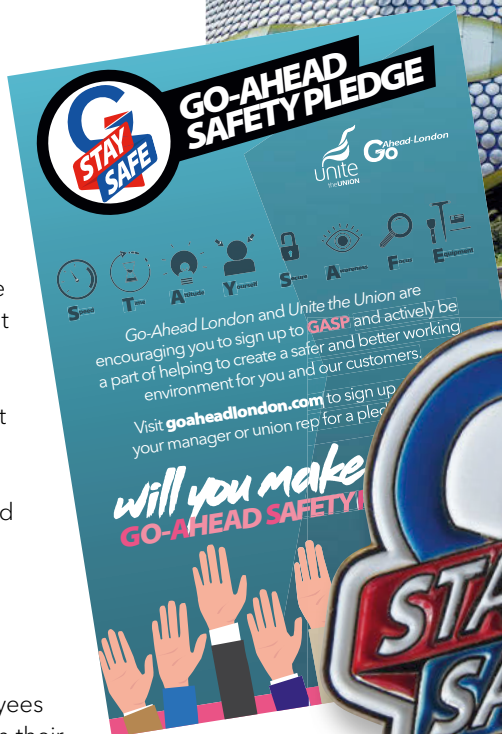
Harrington admits that it is difficult to provide conclusive evidence that GASP alone has improved safety statistics; but logic suggests that it must be beneficial.

### SAFETY STANDARD

Listening to what employees have to say and acting on their suggestions is one of the best ways of creating a safer workplace environment. So says Antony Draper, head of health, safety, environment and quality at Go Plant Fleet Services. With a fleet several thousand strong, it supplies road sweepers, gully emptiers and a variety of other specialist vehicles on both short- and long-term rental. Employing around 800 staff, including irtec-licensed technicians, across 49 UK depots, it offers repair and maintenance services, too.

Earlier this year it became one of the first companies of its type to achieve ISO 45001, a new international standard for occupational health and safety that replaces OHSAS 18001. It provides a framework that helps organisations to manage workplace risk and comply with the relevant legislation.

To help ensure accreditation, Go Plant carried out a review of its safety procedures, which involved consulting the workforce. "You can have the best safety policy in the world, but it has to be lived and breathed by your employees," Draper observes. The consultation resulted in Draper and his colleagues being told what he admits were "a



few home truths".

He cites an example. Technicians working on a gully emptier, for example, in a workshop, may need to gain access to the top of it. As a consequence Go Plant had installed gantries, but its technicians were not entirely happy about using them. One of the issues they raised concerned the proper provision of fall-arrest systems – concerns which have now been addressed, says Draper.

The safety focus is not only applied to employees. ISO 45001 emphasises the need for a business's leadership to become more engaged and responsible, and Go Plant's has risen to the challenge, says Draper. Concerns about potentially serious safety issues are fed all the way from the shop floor to the board of directors, and are acted on, Draper says. "If there's an incident, then we don't want to be in a position where employees can say that they had been telling us for months and months about a particular risk, but nothing was done about it," he observes.

Go Plant's efforts to improve safety are paying off. "At present we have 0.41

reportable injuries per 100,000 hours worked, compared with 0.7 to 0.8 in the past," Draper comments. "Our aim is to achieve zero harm," he adds.

That is Jacqueline O'Donovan's aim, too. As managing director of London-based O'Donovan Waste Disposal, which operates around 100 trucks, including tippers and skip wagons (pictured, p14), she places great emphasis on staff training. That includes training in the use of simple breathing exercises that drivers can employ to help them stay calm when they are under stress in heavy traffic. "As a result they are no longer screaming and shouting," she says; and the number of complaints O'Donovan receives has gone down as a consequence.

### MORE THAN JUST TECHNOLOGY

Compliance with Transport for London's Direct Vision Standard has involved significant investment in onboard sensors and cameras. O'Donovan has gone one stage further, however, and had cameras installed that monitor the drivers as well as the exterior of their vehicles. Far from complaining about being spied on, it is something they want, she says. If they are involved in an accident, then the footage can be used to rebut any claim that they were not paying attention to what was going on around them prior to the collision.

O'Donovan's efforts mean that the company is well in line with FORS (the Fleet Operation Recognition Scheme), CLOCS (Construction Logistics and Community Safety) and a number of



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other standards to which it is accredited.

Based over 150 miles away in Porth, Mid Glamorgan, South Wales, aggregates haulier PJ Webb Haulage has also invested heavily in cameras and sensors in a bid to make its 19-strong fleet as safe as possible in line with its FORS and CLOCS accreditations. The all-Renault fleet is predominantly made up of eight-wheelers, and owner Phil Webb favours a camera package which keeps an eye on the front, rear, nearside and offside of each vehicle.

The BW-BVR integrated sensor and camera system is sourced from Backwatch Safety Products in Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan. Webb has also had additional indicators mounted on his vehicles' bodies or side guards so that cyclists coming alongside can be in no doubt that the vehicle is about to turn.

### EXTRA TRAINING

He has sent drivers on a Safe Urban Driving course so that they can see trucks from a cyclist's perspective. "I sometimes think though that it would make sense for cyclists to spend time in a truck cab, so they can see things from the driver's viewpoint," he adds.

Meanwhile, with over 350 tractor units and upwards of 900 trailers, and best-known as a container haulier, Genesee & Wyoming's UK road operations, which embrace Pentalver (pictured right) and Freightliner, is heavily committed to driver training.

G&W's drivers spend a week at the wheel accompanied by an IAM RoadSmart-accredited trainer and examiner. Areas addressed include everything from the use of exterior mirrors and the importance of keeping the rev counter in the green band, to comprehension of the drivers' hours rules and the need for daily checks to be performed correctly.

Drivers are not engaged in productive work during the week concerned, because they could easily be

## VIRTUAL WORLD

G&W is developing a dynamic virtual reality training programme with the aim of enabling its drivers to be assessed annually in the classroom rather than at the wheel of their trucks.

This involves a headset linked to a training rig which mirrors the user's vehicle, allowing drivers to feel they are sitting in a cab and in full control. The screen view simulates a real-world driving environment.

Driving conditions can be changed and hazards inserted so that the trainer can test the driver's reaction to dangerous situations without the individual or other road users being put at risk. G&W aims to develop the programme further to include the coupling and uncoupling of trailers and daily walk-around checks, among other activities.

stuck waiting at a container port for three hours or more, waiting for a container to be loaded or unloaded. The exercise is an expensive one, but the cost is offset by reduced bills for fuel and accidental damage; and G&W's trucks and trailers suffer less wear and tear.

IAM RoadSmart has also played a key role in helping National Express deliver its Master Driver programme. Participants, among other things, have to take the IAM RoadSmart Advanced Public Service Vehicle training course, then pass the test that is involved. The day-long course means spending four and a half hours on the road and two and a half hours in the classroom.

The classroom session involves a specially designed game which employs a variety of cards to help simulate the sort of difficult situations that drivers can encounter. Participants are expected to discuss them with each other and reach a sensible conclusion.

National Express's wide-ranging efforts to improve safety mean that National Express West Midlands (pictured, p15) scored 99.17% in the British Safety Council's five star health and safety audit.

Says National Express operations and safety director, Mark Heffernan: "It shows that National Express West Midlands' Target Zero ethos has been firmly embedded in every garage and office across the company; and that is so good to see." **TE**

