

How to build a stronger road safety program

Use the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle to protect workers from driving hazards.



If your employees drive for work, getting behind the wheel is one of the most hazardous things they'll do during their day. Whether they're in a tractor trailer, a dump truck, or their own vehicle, they're at risk of a motor vehicle incident (MVI)—the leading cause of workplace deaths in Ontario, as well as a significant cause of critical injuries.

Employers have a legal responsibility to protect their workers. A well-structured road safety program can go a long way toward controlling driving hazards and reducing your workers' risk.

It can also keep costs in check by reducing the likelihood of MVIs and damage. Your company's insurance premiums may be lower, as will the costs associated with worker injuries, vehicle repair or replacement, and potential legal penalties. Safety improvements boost operational effectiveness: fewer incidents mean better service delivery and less downtime.

Plan-Do-Check-Act and your road safety program

The best way to build a road safety program that benefits your business is to follow the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle—a four-step method for continuously improving processes, products, and services.

Applied to your company's road safety program, PDCA would look something like this:

- **Plan:** Make a commitment to improve driver safety, set measurable goals, and assign responsibilities for meeting those goals.
- **Do:** Identify the hazards your drivers face, assess their risk, and implement controls such as policies, driver training, and vehicle inspections.
- **Check:** Monitor incidents, near misses, and driver performance—and analyze the data to determine the success of your controls.
- **Act:** Adjust your program based on the lessons that you learned.

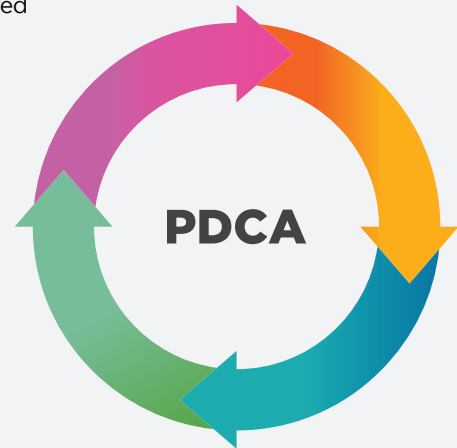
"By taking this systematic approach and prioritizing continuous improvement, you can really focus your efforts and ensure that what you're doing is effective and sustainable," says Michelle Roberts, Vice President of Stakeholder and Public Relations with IHSA.

Plan

- Analyze the problem
- Set goals and establish priorities
- Assign responsibilities
- Decide how performance will be measured

Do

- Implement plans and procedures
- Communicate goals
- Train staff, if necessary



Act

- Review findings
- Use knowledge to make improvements

Check

- Monitor and measure data
- Collect and assess worker feedback
- Document and report results

The importance of hazard assessment

A thorough assessment of the hazards that workers face when they operate a vehicle is at the heart of any successful road safety program. Many of these hazards are common to all drivers, but some of them are workplace specific. At minimum, your program should account for the following hazards:

- **Fatigue:** Long hours, night driving, shift work, and time pressures
- **Distractions:** Electronic devices, navigation systems, and job-related conversations—anything that diverts attention from the road
- **Weather and road conditions:** Rain, snow, ice, poor visibility, or an unfamiliar route
- **Vehicle issues:** Defective brakes, lights, and other vehicle parts as well as improperly secured loads
- **Workplace-specific hazards:** Jobsite configuration, uneven terrain, live traffic nearby, and vehicles carrying different types of loads

After you identify potential hazards, you can evaluate risks related to the driver, the journey, and the vehicle. Who are your drivers? When and where will they travel? What vehicles will they use? For each hazard, assess the probability and consequences of exposure. You should consider contributing factors like prior driving record, schedule pressures, route complexity, and vehicle suitability.

It's crucial to involve the people who know the work best in the assessment, including drivers, supervisors, fleet managers, and joint health and safety representatives. They may identify hazards or provide insights that leadership isn't aware of.

The role of practical controls

Of course, it's not enough to simply assess hazards. You must address them, too, with multiple layers of controls that you communicate clearly to all workers and implement consistently.

"Start by writing a policy that sets expectations, lays out the rules that must be followed, and explains how hazards will be managed," Roberts says.

An effective workplace driving policy might highlight rules about the use of electronic devices, fitness for duty, appropriate driving behaviours, and other related topics. Concrete procedures must back up the policy, covering the steps for trip planning, check-in protocols for solo drivers, pre-trip and post-trip inspections, parking, and more.

Then you'll need to put these procedures into practice. You must train your drivers to recognize hazards and reduce their risk through defensive driving techniques. Roberts suggests using a mix of formats:

- Accessible, on-demand **eLearning courses** can improve hazard awareness.
- Experienced instructors can help participants break down more complex topics in a **live classroom**.
- **Driving simulators and ride-alongs** can act as controlled venues for hands-on training and skills assessment.

You should also make sure that vehicles are assessed using pre-trip inspections and regular checks (e.g., weekly) and maintained following manufacturer recommendations. As with other controls, the scope and frequency of inspections should reflect your operating conditions. Large commercial trucks, construction vehicles, and passenger cars all have different inspection and maintenance requirements.

A focus on continuous improvement

With appropriate controls in place, your company's road safety performance should improve. But you'll only know for certain by analyzing driving data over time. At the "check" stage of the PDCA cycle, look at indicators such as:

- MVIs
- Near misses
- Insurance claims
- Vehicle service reports
- Driver assessments
- Employee feedback

Roberts says that examining near misses can be especially valuable for preventing future tragedies.

If any measures are trending in the wrong direction, try to uncover the root causes. Is your policy unclear? Was training insufficient or ineffective? Is driver scheduling creating unsafe time pressures?

Finally, take action to address these issues. Focus on the items with the highest severity and likelihood first and set realistic targets for improvement.

Remember that change is easier when workers are part of it: encourage drivers to contribute to solutions, celebrate their successes, and reinforce new behaviours through supervision and refresher training.

While driving is a normal part of many jobs, avoid treating the risks as routine. A road safety program will help you demonstrate that you take driving as seriously as other workplace hazards—and protect workers every time they get behind the wheel. ■



Build your road safety program



VISIT [ihsa.ca/roadsafetysolutions](https://www.ihsa.ca/roadsafetysolutions) for resources that make it easy to improve driver safety at your workplace, including:

- Step-by-step guidance for using the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle
- Sample road safety policies and procedures
- Hazard identification and risk assessment templates
- Vehicle inspection and maintenance logs
- In-class and eLearning courses on defensive driving, distracted driving, driver fatigue, and more