

### 3.7 Vehicles

#### **Safety Initiatives in Place Prior to Review**

Policies and procedures for vehicle use by government agencies have existed for many years. The General Services Administration (GSA) has maintained standards which deal with fleet management systems and motor vehicle management of owned and leased vehicles (41 CFR 101 and 102). Among the GSA regulations, is the requirement to designate Vehicle Accounting Officers within the different organizational levels of the agencies to help enforce the regulations and serve as the point of contact for any necessary reporting. In addition to the GSA regulations, the agency has implemented policies and procedures in the form of the MRP Motor Vehicle Manual (MRP 5400) which was last revised in November 2007. This manual supersedes the previous APHIS Motor Vehicle Fleet Management Manual (APHIS 5400) which had been in existence for many years. As a supplement to the Motor Vehicle Manual, there is an APHIS Directive “Defensive Driver Training Requirements” (APHIS 4790.4, dated 2/10/04), which provides more detailed guidance regarding vehicle use and defensive driver training requirements for APHIS employees.

In addition to the GSA, MRP, and APHIS requirements, WS has taken it upon itself to further develop specific internal directives and policies related to the use of specialty vehicles that are unique to the activities within the program. The directives which are specific to WS include Directives 4.150 “Vehicle Use” and 4.155 “All Terrain Vehicles and Snowmobiles.” Both of these directives have also been in existence for many years, and are familiar to all WS programs and employees.

Thus, for many years, regulations, manuals, directives, policies and procedures have existed for the operation of a government-owned or -provided vehicles, which all WS programs and employees have been accustomed to and are in compliance with. The APHIS Safety Health and Employee Wellness Branch (SHEWB) along with the National APHIS Safety and Health Council (NASHC) have been instrumental in seeking and providing authorized sources of training to be used to meet the defensive driver training requirements. One of those authorized sources is the National Safety Council (NSC), which is recognized as a leader in safety-related training and provides self-instructional video and workbook, or internet-based training courses, which are available to all WS employees.

Both the APHIS and WS Safety and Health Councils have a vested interest in the safe use of vehicles, and are proactive in disseminating information regarding vehicle accidents data, safety issues, recalls, and training sources. Both councils also sponsor an annual Safety Incentive Awards Program, and within WS awards programs, the Defensive Driver of the Year Award consistently receives the most number of nominations.

The WS vehicle-use program has never been audited before, but it is evident by the lack of serious vehicle accidents that the WS Program has an exemplary safety record when it comes to the use of motor vehicles.

### **Review Activities**

Review of the WS vehicle program was conducted by Tidewater Inc. under contract with FOH. Tidewater is a private firm that specializes in all aspects of industrial hygiene, and occupational safety and health, including management and safety of vehicle fleets. During the review, a Tidewater Industrial Hygienist examined all WS Directives, documents and manuals pertaining to management and operations of WS vehicle program, training requirements and curricula and training records, safety procedures. They also interviewed WS management and field personnel. As part of the review, the Tidewater representative conducted inspections at four WS state offices including “ride-alongs,” and observations of vehicle use (on and off road, 4-wheeled all terrain vehicle).

### **Summary of Review Findings**

The following observations about the WS Vehicle Safety Program are based on a review of all pertinent documentation on the WS Vehicle Safety Program, interviews with key WS personnel, responses to a survey sent to state and district offices, and on-site reviews.

The WS Vehicle Safety Program is effective. Based upon site visits, WS wildlife specialists, their supervisors, and upper level managers demonstrate a high level of corporate safety culture, at least as it relates to the vehicle safety program. The accident rate of WS vehicles compares favorably with available statistics for government or private vehicle usage. However, an increase in the number of accidents over the last three years, even though it is still below comparable GOV and private vehicle rates, underscores a need for a more structured component to the WS Vehicle Safety Program.

To bring the vehicle safety program to the next level, WS should strive to continually improve leadership, employee involvement, measurement, and continuous improvement. Leadership is critical to improving a safety program. Managers and supervisors at all levels need to support and implement the identified changes. A common misconception is that it is the duty of the safety person to make changes. Although the safety person has many responsibilities relating to employee occupational safety, it is the responsibility of managers to implement changes and keep attention on the program. Supervisors should use the existing awards program. Employee involvement can be increased by nominating more employees for vehicle awards. With respect to measurement, a number of improvements can be made to obtain better data on the number and types of motor vehicle incidents actually encountered. The intent of measuring is not to enforce punitive measures, which can actually reduce reporting and affect morale in a negative way, but to identify trends and implement corrective measures. A requirement of this vehicle study, (e.g., establishing systems to monitor safety compliance) suggests that data

collection will result in continuous improvement. However, unless action is taken based upon this data and resources are committed to do so, data can remain unused. A strong commitment to continuous review plus follow-up action can ensure that continual improvement will occur.

### **Priority Recommendations**

The top priority recommendations made by the vehicle program reviewer were as follows:

1. Investigate the use of newer technologies to enhance communications. Given the critical nature of communications in case of an accident and in the supervisor-employee relationship, cell phone boosters, “bag phones” (these are higher-power cell phones such as the Motorola M800), and personal locator beacons (PLBs) should be investigated for those wildlife specialists who frequently drop out of normal cell phone range during daily activities.
2. Regional safety personnel serve on a collateral duty basis. Given the number of personnel in the field within the eastern and western regions who have direct, daily exposure to safety hazards, these persons should be assigned on a full-time basis.
3. Improve roadside safety by the use of a magnetic strobe light that can be placed on the roof of a vehicle, marker cones placed behind and at a distance from the vehicle to warn approaching traffic, and the use of high-visibility vests. Collapsible cones are now available that can be locked inside tool boxes or elsewhere in pickup trucks to minimize the possibility of theft. Such cones are also available with LED blinker lights to improve visibility, especially in dark or semi-dark conditions.
4. Establish a separate safety budget, independent from other operating budget(s). This will allow needs to be identified and prioritized separately. It will also allow the scope and complexity of safety needs to be more visible. Such needs include not only equipment, but also training, communication, and travel needs.
5. Make information on solutions to common problems available to field personnel by newsletter or possibly a website. Connectivity is limited for many field personnel, and a simple FTP site or website section that does not take a long time to open will make the information more accessible.
6. Establish and implement a more systematic way to ensure compliance with policies and procedures, (e.g., WS directives, safety manual).