

Habit forming

Spectra Energy's fleet safety program aims to prevent distracted driving

If you're a Spectra Energy employee and you're behind the wheel with the motor running, you know that using an electronic communications device (ECD) is strictly verboten, unless legally required to do so (radio-controlled roads or wide-load spotters).

"We work very hard to mitigate as many risks to employees as we can. Getting hurt at work or on the way to or from work is not acceptable," says Paul Greco, director of corporate EHS (environmental health and safety) at Spectra Energy in Chatham, Ontario.

The company, which has 5,400 employees across Canada and the US, launched its distracted driving policy in 2006, with an update in 2010. An all-encompassing ban on hands-free and handheld ECDs, whenever the ECD or the vehicle belongs to Spectra, whether they're on company or personal time, effectively ended all of the controversy and conversation around the issue.

Spectra Energy made the policy simple and direct to facilitate communication and enforcement, but strong leadership support is also crucial to its success. President and CEO Gregory Ebel stands behind the company's safety policies and employees know it. If an employee debates or challenges the no-ECDs edict or the new speed bumps that dot the parking lots at the Chatham office, the discussion ends when someone says, "That's the policy!"

"Since the 2006 launch of the policy, our collision statistics have remained flat, though over 50 percent of the collisions are minor, low-severity collisions, such as hitting a fixed object at a low speed or backing-up incidents. We're happy about that, but still need to eliminate those incidents as well," says Greco. "You put the policies in place because they mitigate or hopefully eliminate a



hazard. If you don't and someone dies in a distracted driving collision, you'll wonder if a policy might have prevented that fatality."

At a company where more than 3,000 employees work with gas and other highly dangerous materials on a daily basis, it's a challenge to shift perceptions around driving while using ECDs. Even now, not all employees accept driving as a potentially lethal, critical task that requires their dedicated attention.

"It's pretty universal—people don't want change and they hate being told what to do," says Greco, whose fleet includes 3,000 light-duty trucks, pick-ups, vans and cars, with many employees also using their own vehicles for Spectra business.

To boost engagement and acceptance, the company knows that education and information are key to connecting with employees across all departments and levels. Employees need to know why Spectra Energy has a distracted driving policy and how distracted driving physiologically affects brain function and reaction time. Personal anecdotes are as important as the facts and figures.

"You need to share stories to win hearts and minds," says Greco. "You can present all the facts in the world, but they're still going to think that they drive better than anyone else and that a collision won't happen to them."

To alter behaviours, companies

must first reprogram minds and attitudes. According to Greco, it typically takes five to 10 years. For example, it took Union Gas, a wholly owned subsidiary of Spectra Energy, a number of years to convince employees they should never jump into a hole with blowing gas (a gas leak).

When it comes to enforcement and consequences, Spectra allows managers a certain amount of discretion. "Be sensitive to the individual's track record and circumstances, when you're deciding whether to let them go with a warning or suspend them without pay for three days," says Greco.

To help employees develop new habits, make technology and alternative modes of transport available in recognition of the fact employees may rely on travel time to catch up on calls and other communications. For example, invest in technology that lets them turn off the phone and engage the "please leave a message because I'm driving" option. Greco himself has found that the six-hour round trip from Chatham to Toronto can be very productive—on the train.

"As a company, do what you can to help employees with what they perceive as the loss of productive work time," says Greco. "Everyone is working hard to do their job. We just want to ensure they do it as safely as possible."

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