

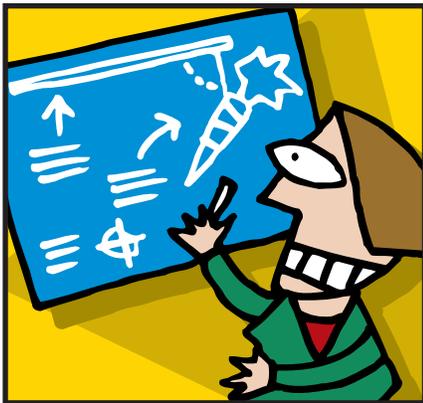


Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Do Safety Incentives Really Work?

by Carmen Deacher



Since the service pin was awarded, safety incentives and rewards have become part of our safety programs. Some incentive programs are simple, awarding pins and certificates; some more elaborate, involving bonuses, trips and other such items.

I get more and more questions about the effectiveness of incentive programs. This is due in part to the lack of desired results, competition among some employees and take-it-or-leave-it attitude.

So why have incentives? After all, isn't people's safety a basic part of the job?

To explore this, let's consider the appeal of incentive programs. For employees—pride and proof of accomplishment is important. That's why pins, certificates, belt buckles and the like are always displayed. For employers—accident reduction, improved safety performance and reduced accident costs are the desired results.

The reason why most programs don't achieve desired results is because the expectations and the outcomes aren't linked. What you want and what you get may be different if there isn't a connected, focused approach to incentive/ reward programs.

Ask yourself this question: "What is the intent of an "incentive" program?" If your answer is "to reduce accidents," my question to you is: How do you *manage* accidents? Answer: You can't. Even more importantly, how do your employees reduce accidents? Did they intend to have them before?

An incentive program should have the principal objective of motivating individuals to behave consistently in such a way that accidents, which result from poor behavior, are eliminated. Motivation and behavior are the key

words, and identifying inappropriate and poor behavior is the focus of foundation of desired improvements and incentives. Accidents and reductions of them are results of behavior, not manageable outcomes.

Rewards—as mentioned before—are accepted with pride by those who receive them. Here's the other clue into the ineffectiveness of most incentive programs: The organization doesn't reward itself. There's no way of knowing if these programs benefit the bottom line, and it can't really link its benefits to those of individual employees.

So how do you develop or retool a safety incentive program? Here are some tips:

- Determine true costs of accidents and injuries (not just claims dollars).
- Determine root causes of accidents — all of them, not just those of driver or employee.
- Manage behavior. Are pre-trips being done correctly? Are people on time every day? Are the logs filled out completely and properly?
- Determine safety objectives and expected true costs savings to the organization if they're achieved.

The Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA) operates two safety incentive programs: Annual Safe Driver and Distinguished Driver Award. Both awards reward individual drivers who do not have any chargeable accidents for the calendar year. KCATA also periodically runs monthly incentive programs that focus on team awards. The incentives—cash and days off—for the Distinguished Driver award increase for each continuous year that the driver meets the program's requirements. However, the Annual Safe Driver award remains constant; a pin is given each year that the driver qualifies for the award. Gloria Young, Manager of Safety and Instruction for KCATA, believes that "the most important aspect of developing a safety incentive program is to make it a labor-management effort," which includes the drivers in developing the program.

- Determine the amount of the expected savings to be available for incentive programs. Note: Some of the expected savings should be kept for the organization as its reward.
- Establish group and individual behavior incentives. The organization (or group) must meet its objectives, then individuals who have met defined behavior standards get the reward.
- Communicate the program to everyone.
- Measure and communicate results throughout the incentive year.
- Incentive programs should reward the desired outcome, such as accident reduction.
- The greater the perceived benefit of incentive programs the more successful the program is.
- Benefits can include cash, lottery tickets, shares of company stock, trading stamps, patches, gift certificates, plaques, extra holidays and other privileges.
- Hold annual banquets to recognize the recipients of these awards.
- Press releases to local newspapers are a good way to recognize award recipients and gives your agency a positive image.
- Awards do not have to be large to be effective. Small awards can be handed out more frequently, they are probably less conducive to under reporting of accidents, and they act to reinforce pro-safety attitudes.
- The amount of the incentive should continue to grow progressively as the individual driver accumulates a larger number of uninterrupted accident-free goals.
- Operational rules of the program should be kept simple so that everyone understands them.
- “Random” acts of kindness are always appreciated—thank you notes, snacks, remembering important days (birthday or service anniversaries).
- Include both group and individual performance rewards; and don’t forget to reward the agency as a whole for meeting goals. What are the benefits of such a refocused program? The entire organization is involved in meeting safety objectives. Management is

focused on behavior modification; employees are motivated to help each other and themselves achieve results, and everyone benefits if objectives are achieved.

Reprinted with permission from “Safety Incentives—Do They Really Work?,” by Carmen Deacher, The Rural Transporter, Winter 2000-2001.

Reprinted from the January 2002 issue of the *Kansas TransReporter*, a publication of the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) at the Kansas University Transportation Center.