

Transport Topics

July 2003

Getting Aggressive About Security

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The transportation industry has never been without challenges—ours is an industry that is extraordinarily complex and vital to the economy. For the last three years, warnings of terrorist attacks via chemical, biological and strategic weaponry have been a fact of life and the attacks of 9/11 have remained a frightening reminder that no industry is impenetrable.

The intelligence industry has made us eerily aware of terrorist plots to use trucks as weapons of mass destruction. Just last week, an individual with a fraudulent CDL (commercial drivers license) attempted to gain employment at a tank truck company in Florida. And

while we—as an industry—agree that these threats are real, we seem somewhat reluctant to aggressively respond to these concerns.

That could be a serious mistake.

A recent survey conducted by the Department of Homeland Security found that almost half of all businesses are still not conducting emergency drills, tightening background checks, or making other needed improvements to security. As an industry, we can no longer afford to be complacent. The key to ensuring the safety of our drivers, cargo and the people we share the road with is to take a unified stance and create a proactive plan of action.

I'd like to encourage others in the trucking industry to increase their security awareness by offering some insight into the security upgrades we put into action at my own company, Ventura Transfer.

Over the past year, we took four critical steps addressing this issue: We identified the problem, developed a plan, got our staff and drivers to buy into that plan, and evaluated our process—and progress—every step of the way.

Identifying the problem began with breaking it down into a multiplicity of problems, each representing an

area of particular vulnerability for our company, or, for that matter, any trucking company. Assembling this list and determining which procedures drivers were or were not following armed us with valuable information we used to construct a clear and concise security plan. That plan included provisions aimed at improving communication with our drivers, upgrading training programs, and developing materials to reinforce our key messages. Some examples are:

- Terminals must be locked and secured during non-business hours.
- If drivers are stopped in transit or held overnight, outlets are cable sealed (not tin sealed).
- Tractors are double-checked to ensure they are securely locked before a terminal is closed for the night.
- Trailer or container doors are always secured and locked.
- Drivers maintain two-way communication to ensure tracing capability.
- Drivers have been trained to report any suspicious activities to the local police, and to disclose information only to individuals with proper clearance.

- Drivers always cable-seal tank cars when they are not being unloaded and document all information.
- Drivers receive formal training on important safety procedures.
- While on the job, drivers vary their routes; park in areas where other truckers are present; avoid unsecured, dark, deserted areas; use reputable truck stops; avoid unnecessary stops; never pick up hitchhikers; always be suspicious of anyone asking them to stop because of an “accident”; and constantly be aware of their surroundings.

Once we had developed an improved safety and security plan, we realized that for it to be a success, its procedures had to become an integral part of company operations. For that to happen, “buy-in” at all levels was crucial, or the process could break down, putting lives at stake. In order to ensure company buy-in, we got a commitment from the highest levels of our management team to support our security measures and articulate those policies to their staff. Additionally, held meetings with our drivers and modified our drivers training manual to include our new guidelines and procedures.

The final element of our security plan upgrade isn’t final at all: We will constantly reconsider and reevaluate the plan, making sure drivers and staff across the board have the training and information they need to keep our company, our industry and our country safe.

Ventura Transfer Company manages the intermodal handling and distribution of products shipped in bulk throughout the United States and is headquartered in Long Beach, Calif.