

COURTESY SHUTTLE SAFETY

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The operation of courtesy shuttles is a welcomed guest amenity, but one which demands proper attention from the management team to reduce the potential for injury to the guests and employees.

Commercial vehicle (shuttle) accidents are always a sobering occurrence. Passengers, whether injured or not, leave with negative feelings about their experience. Those feelings may create lasting memories which spur them to patronize your competitors instead of returning to your establishment.

The potential for expensive medical claims, and damaged business reputation is significant. Loss costs come from many aspects of the operation:

- Lawsuits by passengers.
- Decreased customer confidence in your establishment.
- Physical Damage Deductibles.
- Loss of use of vehicle.
- Reduced resale value.
- Increased lease settlement costs.
- Supervisory time to investigate accidents.
- Damaged luggage.

Fortunately, there are basic guidelines for controlling the exposure to loss. The most effective controls are found in these main categories:

- Employee selection.
- Communication (procedures, training and supervision).
- Route management.
- Controlling slips and falls.
- Post accident controls.

EMPLOYEE SELECTION

The most critical function in controlling shuttle losses is finding and hiring the best driver-employees. The ideal candidate will have:

- Prior commercial driving experience (passenger transport, if possible).
- A valid driver's license (if applicable, a CDL with passenger endorsement).
- Clear or "acceptable" Motor Vehicle Report.
- No or few Accidents/Moving Violations as measured against your corporate standard of performance for the job description
- Sufficient skill and ability to operate a shuttle safely (demonstrated during a pre-employment driving evaluation or "road test")

Prior employer references and/or background checks (credit, criminal history, etc.) can yield additional valuable information (dependent on employment practices in your state).

All prospective employees should be subject to a "road test" to evaluate their ability to complete the job duties. The same route should be driven by each job candidate, and the same evaluator should be used each time to ensure consistency. The results of the evaluation should be documented, and follow up training should be offered for any newly hired drivers on those areas of the road test which were judged unsatisfactory.

COMMUNICATION PROCEDURES

A procedures manual or booklet should be developed for the driver-employees who operate the shuttle(s). This reference document outlines the essential do's and don'ts of shuttle operation and eliminates guesswork or improvisation on the part of the employee.

This also provides for driver accountability, and facilitates supervisory evaluation of job performance.

TRAINING

Initial orientation should include a review of the aforementioned company policies and procedures, and, when possible, time spent observing another tenured driver. This gives the new hire an opportunity to learn routes, pickup/drop off points, etc.

Ongoing "classroom" training should be offered as often as possible. The training sessions may be as short as a 10-20 minute discussion of basic defensive driving topics, or as complex as a day long program which results in a professional certification of the drivers. Discussions with drivers are usually more effective than simply providing brochures or handouts.

Safety training that is offered "behind the wheel" in the form of driver performance evaluations is the most effective way to improve driver behaviors and reduce accidents. The "supervisory ride along" provides an opportunity to see how the driver actually performs under normal circumstances. In addition to driving safety, customer satisfaction issues can be evaluated making the time well spent by the supervisor.

SUPERVISION

In addition to "the ride along," the supervisor can monitor driver performance a number of ways:

- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Evaluation of the completeness of pre-trip inspection (and other) reports
- Evaluation of How's My Driving call in reports (if using such a program)

ROUTE MANAGEMENT

Another important consideration is to alert the customer early in their visit as to how much time is necessary to safely transport him/her to their destination (airport, etc.) and what the regular departure (and pick up) times are. The employee needs to be able to react to the pressure exerted by a hurried, possibly frantic, passenger who has not allowed enough time to get to the airport.

Most runs of shuttle vehicles are between the facility and the local public transportation terminals, tourist attractions, special event venues, etc. The familiarity of the roads leading to these fixed locations allows for the development of good controls on routes - a significant factor in the exposure to loss.

Particular attention should be given to the following:

- Reduction of travel on congested streets and roads
- Elimination of as many as possible lane changes, left turns, etc.
- Determining the best loading/unloading and parking areas (consider the potential for trip/fall hazards, weather protection, etc.)
- Working with local law enforcement and street/highway departments for special event routing
- Special routing during negative weather conditions, e.g., ice, wind, fog
- Proper marking of loading/unloading areas for the customer
- Time scheduling to avoid needless rushing, or conflicts with traffic, etc.

All too often, great driver selection and effective employee relations are minimized because the driver is on their own in the vehicle. Too little guidance is offered to assist them in the everyday problems (routing around traffic at rush hour, avoiding construction zones, etc.) of moving customers and their belongings from point A to point B.

This breakdown can foster frustration in employees and, ultimately, in the customer.

CONTROLLING SLIPS AND FALLS

In addition to vehicle accidents, a major loss source from the operation of courtesy shuttles is passenger slips and falls when entering or exiting the van. These losses can usually be attributed to improper training and inappropriate equipment.

STEP STOOL USE

Portable plastic or metal step stools, like the one illustrated in figure 1 are often used to assist passengers in entering or exiting the shuttle vehicle. While these step stools are lightweight, inexpensive, and easy to use, they also pose significant slip/fall hazards that may result in severe injuries to shuttle passengers.



Figure 1

STEP STOOL HAZARDS

Step stools become slip/fall hazards when they:

- become damaged or deteriorated from constant use
- are placed on uneven, unstable or slippery surfaces
- do not have a slip resistant stepping surface
- are placed too far from the shuttle vehicle

A SAFE SOLUTION

Shuttle vehicle operators can easily and affordably protect their passengers from injury by discontinuing use of step stools and installing permanently mounted, retractable steps as shown in figure 2.



SINGLE & DOUBLE FOLDAWAY STEPS

Easy to install self-storing single and double trailer steps can be either bolted on or welded on. They feature a non skid perforated surface, heavy durable black powder coated steel and an anti skid strip for additional safety. Colorful retail packaging.

Figure 2

The steps are readily available at any recreational vehicle dealer in sizes to fit any van or bus entrance. The cost varies depending on size, height and operational requirements. They are easily installed by bolting or welding the unit to the shuttle vehicle frame.

The steps are equipped with slip and weather resistant treads. These steps provide a stable stepping surface for passengers and eliminate the slip/fall hazards created by a step stool. They fold away under the van when not in use and can be easily extended by the driver when needed. They can also be purchased with electric power to automatically extend and retract with the opening and closing of the shuttle vehicle door.

A FEW MORE SHUTTLE SAFETY TIPS

- Prior to each use, the driver should thoroughly inspect the step treads and support frame to make sure they are in good repair, securely attached and free of mud, dirt, ice, snow or other debris. This helps to assure that the steps provide a stable and slip resistant platform for passengers.
- The driver should always be available to assist passengers in entering and exiting the vehicle. This passenger courtesy gesture provides an extra measure of safety in the event of a slip or fall.
- Always load and unload passengers on the side of the vehicle away from traffic.

POST ACCIDENT CONTROLS

In the unlikely event that the vehicle is involved in an accident or a passenger trips and falls, there are many responsibilities that management should be prepared to act on. A few of the main categories include:

- Ensuring that the passenger's urgent medical needs are addressed
- Documenting who was aboard the vehicle at the time of the accident, and the extent and nature of any passenger injuries
- Providing an alternate means of transportation for those passengers who are unhurt
- Investigating and documenting the circumstances of the accident
- Reporting the accident details to the appropriate authorities promptly

These areas of investigation should be covered in employee training sessions and summarized in any employee handbook(s). To further simplify the process at the time of an accident, and to ensure that all the necessary information is obtained, accident reporting "kits" should be kept in each vehicle.

Instructions should be included in the reporting kit to enable the driver to fully document the scene of the accident to include cell phone or other photos.

Design: [Graphic Design Centre](#)

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