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Health and safety

family and his/her colleagues at work also has huge impact on the company," says Tony D'Almeida a specialist for the People Partnership Department at UTi, which actively supports the Trucking Wellness project.

"Also as a result of an accident, the insurance costs in the retirement funds risk premiums are raised at additional financial cost to the members of the various industry funds," he adds.

Besides the loss of morale among fellow employees, accidents affect the company in other ways.

The largest cost is that of the vehicle and the load it carries.

"One truck can cost over R1 million to replace, and often the value of its contents is incalculable," says D'Almeida. "The commercial value of the load can be worth many millions, and there is the additional consequential loss that non-delivery can also cause."

Con Roux, commercial manager for the N3 Toll Concession, which is also involved with Trucking Wellness, has seen an interesting trend. "Many insurance companies are coming on board because it is in their financial interests to make sure that truck drivers are healthy. One trucking accident can cost millions, and ultimately someone has to pay up. In most cases, it's the insurers.

"Ultimately, it really is in everyone's interests to make sure that this project succeeds."

Roux emphasises the social responsibility element expected of trucking companies with regard to the quality of life of their drivers, as well as other road users who are negatively affected by accidents. "There is definitely a moral high ground to be taken here," he says. "The consequences of the ill-health of drivers are

a major national problem for the industry. By getting involved in Trucking Wellness, a transport operator is strides ahead of its competitors in terms of social responsibility.

"Brand awareness is vitally important in this industry," adds Roux. "And companies are starting to realise the value of being recognised as an organisation that cares enough about its employees to make their wellness a priority."

UTi is one company that sees positive results of this.

"By constantly encouraging our drivers to stop at the clinics and focus on their health, well-being and wellness education, we are getting a lot of acknowledgement from within the industry for being a company that cares about its employees," says D'Almeida.

"There has been a significant increase in the number of drivers who want to work for us, which allows us to be more selective and ensure that we get the best candidates. UTi is now recognised as a company that drivers want to work with and for, and as a leader in the industry."

"UTi relies on its brand for recognition within the industry, and just one accident can do irreparable damage to the company's service reputation, given that branding is always prominently displayed on the vehicle," he adds.

Louis Hollander, human resources director at Imperial Logistics, adds: "As Imperial Logistics is the largest logistics company in South Africa, with a major responsibility toward its employees' health, it makes sense to participate in a project that promotes better health for our employees. Employees who are not healthy are a major risk toward not only themselves if they are drivers, but also to other road users.

"Absenteeism and employee replacement costs adversely affect the company. The company benefits from Trucking Wellness, as employees are treated by their mobile clinics and do not have to take leave to go to government hospitals or clinics."

Magretia Brown, Labour Relations manager for the Road Freight Association, concludes: "Trucking Wellness results in healthy employees, a prolonged employment relationship and increased productivity, which in turn has a positive effect on the overall performance of the business, and the South African economy on the one hand.

"On the other hand, it also provides for a healthy individual, with an enhanced personal and family life," she says.

"Driver well-being is obviously a primary focus point in this industry because [drivers] play such an important primary role.

"However, many other employees are also relied on in this industry, and as such the programmes are managed in such a way that they can reach and serve any employee within the industry," she adds.

Trucking Wellness provides the ideal solution to a growing issue at no cost to companies themselves. The clinic services are free to the drivers (and anyone who may require them), so companies can address the well-being of their drivers free from financial repercussions.

Catherine Larkin
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