How National Grid Is Improving Fleet Safety with Smith System Training

With more than 11,500 drivers, National Grid in Hicksville, New York, understands how critical it is to invest in the safety of each and every employee. The gas and electric utility company, which covers New England, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, parts of New Hampshire and all of New York state, relies on Smith System training to make sure that all of its drivers have the best tools to handle whatever occurs when they're behind the wheel.

"We started using Smith System in 2008," says Samantha Murray, vehicle safety manager at National Grid. "We started it as a pilot program for our gas operators, but we received such great feedback on it that we made it part of our policy."

In 2014, the company implemented a Safe Motor Vehicle Operations Policy that made driver safety training part of its requirements. Drivers are required to take a refresher course every five years, but operators in some departments, such as those who perform meter reading

services, take the training every three years.

"Our drivers liked the training from the very beginning," Murray says. "It's now something that everyone in our company participates in, from field employees to executives. It's been very beneficial."

Finding the Right Fit With Smith System

When National Grid first began seeking out a partner for training, Smith System immediately soared to the top of the list because of its long history of excellence and its strong reputation as a quality program. Murray says they sent several employees through Smith System's DriverTrainer™ program so that they would have staff available to train new hires and provide guidance for drivers.

The company now has 15 to 20 certified Driver Trainers in multiple locations for in-house training. National Grid also utilizes Smith System Instructors to conduct DriverDirect™ training and DriverDirect™ Advanced Backing, Parking and Close Quarter Maneuvering

Courses on-site. In 2019, National Grid will conduct over 200 DriverDirect classes and 70 DriverDirect Advanced Backing, Parking and Close Quarter Maneuvering Courses throughout its different locations.

"This is now part of our onboarding process," Murray says. "Our instructors get a lot of positive feedback, and people like the fact that we feel it's worth putting time and effort into each driver. Any time we have a transfer or a new hire, they're going through the training."

In addition, National Grid uses Smith System's E-Learning courses for refresher training and to reinforce what drivers learned in the behind-the-wheel classes. They were the first company to adopt Smith's Arrive Alive Safety Series whiteboard courses.

One of the benefits of providing training for all employees is that they immediately have an additional skill set that could help them in their careers.

"For example, maybe you're hired in as a mechanic, but by the time we finish your onboarding, you'll also be trained as a professional driver. That's a big benefit to people."

Expanding Their Efforts

Listening to the feedback from drivers has helped National Grid change certain aspects of its training. The company uses a wide variety of both company and personal vehicles. About 63% of those vehicles are company owned, and one-third of those are heavy-duty vehicles. The remainder are a mix of medium- and light-duty vehicles.

"One of the things we heard a lot was that people wanted to learn some of these things using the company vehicles, especially the heavy haul drivers," Murray says. "It made a lot more sense for people in the field to do that, because it allows them to focus on where the risk is and how to manage it."

Because heavy haul vehicles face specific challenges such as limited visibility, a poor turning radius and a longer braking distance, National Grid saw the value in allowing drivers to use those vehicles to learn the Smith System principles.

National Grid initially offered the advanced driver training program featuring The Smith5Keys®, but after looking at where their greatest challenges existed, the company recently added Smith System's Advanced Backing course to its requirements.

The Advanced Backing program teaches drivers how to avoid the most common types of crashes, which are backing, parking and close quarter maneuvering. Overall, backing collisions represent as much as 60% of most fleet crashes, so being able to prevent such crashes can have a significant positive impact on the company's bottom line.

"Adding that to the 5Keys has been really good

> ## "It takes a unique driver to be able to have the stamina for this industry."

for us," Murray says. "Most of our collisions happen in backing and close-quarter situations, so it was important for us to be able to add that. We worked with our claims department to get insight on how to make the program more effective, and that was one of the things they recommended."

Seeing Lasting Results

Over time, National Grid has watched the number of crashes decline and noticed that drivers are receptive to the training and enthusiastic about how it helps them become more skilled behind the wheel.

"Our preventable collisions have gone down every year since we started providing Smith System training," Murray says. "And, since we've made it part of our policy, those preventable collisions are 33% lower. That's great progress."