



How Virginia Transportation Benefits From Advanced Driver Safety Training



Companies that hire drivers and specialize in any form of transportation face a certain number of shared challenges, but each one has its individual challenges as well. For the [automotive transportation industry](#), those challenges often come from the sheer size and scope of their vehicles.

Ensuring that drivers have the proper training to maneuver their trucks as well as the cargo they're carrying is essential to the success of such companies. It's so important to [Virginia Transportation Corporation](#) that they rely on Smith System training for every driver.

Providing auto transportation services throughout the United States and Canada, Virginia Transport has nearly 500 drivers who work daily to move vehicles from one location to the next. That can mean a single vehicle or an entire fleet, but each one must arrive safely, efficiently and on time.

Deanna dela Cruz, director of safety compliance for the company, says that adding [Smith System driver training](#) to their onboarding process has made a significant difference in how the company approaches new hires – and the response has been enthusiastic.

"The new drivers really embrace the training," she



says. "We're able to relate all of [The Smith5Keys®](#), which are relevant to our company as far as common mistakes we see. It makes a difference in how they respond to situations on the road."

After looking into several different driver safety programs, dela Cruz says they chose Smith System because it had the best track record and her company was impressed with what they offer.

"The fact that they have been around for so long and have such a strong reputation really helped," she says. "Plus, the fact that they are so embedded in so many other companies around the world says a lot about them. If you're going to invest in your fleet, you want to get the best there is."



Keeping Training a Priority with DriverTrainers

Because the need for training drivers is ongoing, Virginia Transportation Corporation sent a dozen staff members through the Smith System [DriverTrainer™](#) certification program. That means the company now has its own in-house trainers throughout the various regions they drive in. As a result, they can provide instruction to new drivers whenever necessary as well as provide refresher training to established drivers.

"Experienced drivers can sometimes be resistant to taking additional training at first, but we explain to them that this is not about teaching them how to drive," says dela Cruz. "It's giving them the tools to take their existing knowledge and provide them with additional skill sets. It lets us bring to the forefront some things they're probably already aware of but just haven't thought much about."

After drivers have gone through the training, dela Cruz says, they are enthusiastic supporters of The Smith5Keys – and many of them are excited to take what they've learned and share it with their families to help keep them safer, too.

"When they go through this training, they realize that it's all for their benefit. We're not preaching, but we're showing them how they can truly make a difference on the road," she says. "They realize this is not your average driver safety course."

Common Solutions for Uncommon Problems

Part of what makes the Smith System driver training so effective, dela Cruz says, is that it can be applied universally to any type of vehicle. So whether the driver is behind the wheel of a truck with an 80-foot rack of cars or is driving a single passenger vehicle, the principles of safety are the same.

"Our trailers are much larger than the average truck trailer, and our product is exposed, not contained inside of a trailer," dela Cruz notes. "Also, we have an

overhang in the front of the vehicle, so there are a lot of challenges in terms of height requirements and needing to be aware of their surroundings."

That's where techniques like learning [close quarter maneuvering](#) are critical, and The Smith5Keys reinforces how to manage those situations. Another challenge facing their drivers are situations where [driving in reverse](#) can't be avoided.

"The average trailer is 53 feet; ours are 75 feet and now we have an extension that takes it to 80 feet," she says. "We don't encourage them to back up but there are some cases where it can't be avoided."

As with all larger vehicles, stopping distances have to be carefully considered, and the truck has an extremely limited turning radius.

Smith System training allows drivers to learn new ways to improve their skills when driving in reverse, and also teaches ways to avoid getting in a situation where backing up is necessary.

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Training for a Competitive Edge

Being able to provide their drivers with Smith System training is something that gives Virginia Transportation Corporation an advantage in a competitive industry.

"Finding qualified drivers is a challenge because this really is a specialty," dela Cruz notes. "It takes a unique driver to be able to have the stamina for this industry. They're not only responsible for the truck, but for every car on the rack."

Once a driver takes possession of the vehicles, they are responsible for all of the cargo, including driving each vehicle onto and off of the rack.

"Nobody but the driver is legally allowed to touch that product, so drivers take a lot of pride in their work," she says. "Being able to provide them with this caliber of training is one thing we do to show each individual driver that we're invested in them."

To anyone who is reluctant to take Smith System training, dela Cruz says she would offer the same advice she gives to her own drivers: just try it.

"Every driver is going to take something away from it," she says.