

INQUIRY INTO MANAGING FATIGUE IN TRANSPORT

Submission from Finemore
Holdings Limited

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over twenty years, Finemores has been at the leading edge of enhancements to road safety in the transport industry. We became a Pilot Operator under the Fatigue Management Alternative Compliance Pilot Scheme because we strongly believe that the Fatigue Management Plan will assist us to realise the expectations of all stakeholders:-

- Our customers expect prompt, reliable and damage-free delivery of goods; however
- governments expect transport companies to operate in a safe and responsible manner; and
- the community expects to share the roads with safe and responsible drivers; and
- our employees expect to work in a safe and stimulating environment; and
- our shareholders expect a good return on their investment.

Fatigue is a significant contributor to workplace accidents, and is caused by a multitude of factors, including:-

- the lack of flexibility in managing work and rest periods to suit the prevailing conditions and the individual's body clock
- stress, either work-related or due to personal problems
- poor health/lifestyle
- the quality and frequency of rest, including short breaks, long breaks and extended breaks (leave)
- the lack of backup by management and operations staff
- unreasonable demands imposed by customers or management
- the lack of clear policies and procedures

Our risk management strategies address all of the factors that contribute to driver fatigue, and their effectiveness can be clearly demonstrated by our management systems and accident record.

However, Finemores believes in continuous improvement so we have instigated the Finemores 2000 Program to set the standards as World Best Practice in everything we do by September 2000. Further improvements to our fatigue management strategies are high on our priorities.

Successful fatigue management is not simply a matter of limiting driving hours and imposing a rigid rest regime on drivers. The complex range of contributing factors means that-

- there needs to be systems to assist the drivers, such as training, personal counselling, equipment maintenance, documented policies and procedures, etc.;
- there needs to be consultation on the best approach to scheduling and monitoring;
- there needs to be open communication between the drivers and operations staff to alter schedules and rest periods when required;
- as each individual has different fatigue “triggers” and situations vary day-to-day, drivers require a degree of flexibility to manage their own fatigue, without the stress caused by not meeting legal requirements. They must be able to stop and rest *before* fatigue sets in;
- education is required to raise awareness of the causes, effects and preventive measures. This is a vital part of the total safety awareness strategies which must be aimed at management, operations, customers, drivers, the drivers' families, regulators and the community at large.

Although we believe that there are still improvements to be made to the Scheme, Finemores' management and drivers are in full agreement that the additional flexibility provided by the Alternative Compliance regime has further enhanced our proven capability as a safe and responsible transport operator, whilst enabling us to operate within legal requirements. This will not only benefit the company, but also our employees, our customers, the transport industry and the community as a whole.

CORE RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Below is a summary of the strategies currently employed by Finemores in order to increase safety, particularly in managing fatigue.

Provision of safe, reliable and comfortable vehicles

- vehicles are modern, which are safe and easy to operate (the average age is less than 3 years)
- vehicles are air conditioned for driver comfort
- new vehicles fitted with air bag suspension, providing added safety and comfort
- all vehicles are comprehensively maintained
- all vehicles are fitted with Driver Monitoring Devices

Provision of facilities for rest and recuperation

- showers, rest rooms and tea/coffee facilities at all depots
- sleeping facilities at all major depots (motels used elsewhere if drivers held over)
- drive-through truck washes at our four largest depots
- yardmen and/or freight handling equipment is used to minimise manual handling and delays, and some depots allow for loading/unloading whilst the drivers rest

Provision of operations backup

- 24 hour national operations staff on duty
- 24 hour accident/emergency response teams
- operations staff know their drivers and recognise their individual skills and needs in order to effectively schedule trips, rests and time off
- operations staff know the routes and driving/unloading times for all tasks
- operations staff keep records of hours worked and check reports to ensure that drivers stay within the limits
- operations staff determine the amount of driving time available and the level of driver fatigue *prior* to assigning driving tasks to each driver
- operations staff maintain regular communication with their drivers to monitor fatigue
- if operations staff believe that a driver is fatigued, the driver is immediately taken off active duty, and schedules are adjusted or another driver enlisted, as required
- rosters are set to get the drivers home as frequently as possible, allowing better rest
- 24-hour continuous operations have two permanent drivers to allow maximum at-home rest
- relief drivers are used to allow time off for permanent drivers
- drivers are placed on rotating shifts where possible
- driver and operations guidelines and policies to manage the FMP
- schedules which require a minimum fifteen minute break after a maximum of four hours driving (except for two-up and remote area schedules)

Provision of management policies, procedures and assistance

- policies and procedures for all processes in all divisions are comprehensively documented, including a comprehensive Drivers Manual issued to each driver and operations area
- 1800 Safety Line used as a tool to monitor driver performance on the road
- Chrispay Human Resources database records training, medical tests, accidents, Safety Line calls etc.
- provide career advancement, and relief from boredom, by encouraging drivers to move to different driving tasks or to administration
- all employees have direct access to the Managing Director if they feel they have been unfairly treated in any way
- personnel assigned with responsibility for the FMP
- stringent requirements for driver eligibility to enter the FMP
- Key Performance Indicators benchmarked against World Best Practice, as part of the Finemores 2000 Program to be the best in the world at everything we do by September 2000

Provision of extensive training, health advice and counselling services

- drivers undergo an extensive selection process, including reference checks, a check of their driving record from the relevant authority, a full medical check, a psycho-technical test and an on-road assessment by a Driver Assessor Trainer
- drivers undergo an extensive induction process, including a one week course at DECA (includes fatigue management techniques) and specific task-related training
- Driver Assessor Trainers monitor driver performance and re-train drivers when required
- drivers have annual medical checks
- all employees have access to extensive health advice and information
- addition of new FMP training program
- Employee Assistance Program to supply 24 hour counselling services
- further training and encouragement regarding improving driver health

Provision of rewards

- drivers with over five years non-contributory accident-free driving are given substantial awards, which include the drivers' families as a means of raising safety awareness at home
- these awards also acknowledge their partners' role in encouraging the drivers to drive in a rested state and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and their understanding when drivers are required to stay away for extended periods.

RESEARCH INTO FATIGUE

Finemores was involved in comprehensive research into the effects of fatigue, conducted by Anne Williamson at the University of New South Wales. The research focused on the effects of working hours on the participants' psycho-technical abilities.

Thirty two Finemores personnel were involved in both controlled clinical testing and on-road testing.

The first study looked at the influence of the current regulatory regime on driver fatigue and performance to provide a baseline for comparison of alternative approaches, and was conducted on-road. The results showed that there was no evidence of particularly high levels of fatigue or performance deterioration during individual trips averaging between 13 and 14 hours. It also showed that the effects were similar for night or day trips, provided that the drivers had a long rest prior to any night driving. However, over the working week using this regime, there was a significant drop in the drivers' ability to pick up infrequent visual signals. Although not large enough to be a safety concern, this performance drop was an indication that longer work periods without providing adequate rest *throughout the working week* could lead to significant performance deterioration.

The second study looked at the effects of significantly longer working hours and was, by necessity, conducted in a simulated environment. There was a significant deterioration in performance with very long shifts on consecutive days, as fatigue is accumulated. However, the study suggested that there was no significant performance drop in fully rested drivers doing up to 16 hours of work, but that such long shifts cannot be sustained without adequate recovery periods.

Although further research needs to be conducted to allow for a variety of work/short-rest/long-rest regimes to be compared, the conclusions are that effective fatigue management must emphasise rest-taking as the means of allowing sufficient recovery time rather than only limiting the length of the work shift. Control of fatigue and safe performance is related to the steps the drivers take *over the working week*, not just on a per-shift basis. Drivers who took more breaks and obtained more sleep throughout the week showed lower levels of fatigue and better performance, even with occasional work shifts of significantly longer hours than are currently allowed.

CONCLUSIONS

Finemores applied for approval as a Phase II Pilot Operator in January 1997. Final signoff to commence as a Pilot Operator was received in March 1999 following extensive concessions to our original proposal. Since this time we have commenced the implementation of the Fatigue Management Plan throughout our operating Divisions, except where restrictions have been applied.

We firmly believe that our original proposal would have provided both increased efficiency and improved safety. The final arrangements have resulted in little gain to either area, due to the overly restrictive limitations imposed by one of the State regulators.

There has been extensive research into the causes, effects and possible solutions to driver fatigue. We understood that the purpose of the Pilot Scheme was to provide a controlled practical environment in which to trial these theoretical solutions. However, we feel that the restrictions imposed have limited our ability to effectively trial the proposed fatigue management strategies. This has severely diminished the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme.

An effectively managed system of accredited self-regulation is the only way to give drivers and operators the ability to control fatigue on the road.

All parties related to the freight task have a role to play in providing effective fatigue management - management, operations, drivers, drivers' families, customers, the regulators and the community. All these groups must be educated in the causes, effects and preventive measures involved in effective management of fatigue, as part of the total spectrum of raising safety awareness and reducing safety-related incidents, both on and off the road.

Drivers must have the flexibility to control their daily work/rest regime, as long as they comply with an overall system of fatigue management. Occasional extended working hours is not a contributing factor to fatigue-related incidents providing that adequate recuperation is provided. We believe that there has been too much focus on the detailed operational issues without keeping the big picture in mind. Details about fractions of hours are best left to the drivers discretion. The focus for management and the regulators must be on the work/rest regime for drivers over weekly, fortnightly, monthly and annual periods. We must allow greater flexibility for the drivers to work within those limits to suit their individual body clocks and the prevailing work environment.

The primary messages that Finemores would like to convey are that:-

- **Fatigue management is everyone's responsibility, and**
- **Flexibility for each individual to work within defined boundaries is the key to effective fatigue management systems.**