



We Can Make These Work Areas Safe

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Taxi Driver Safety

Taxi safety has come to the forefront and become one of the most serious issues facing municipalities worldwide. Too many taxi drivers have been robbed, brutalized and murdered. Cities must mandate safety regulations to protect the people who work in the world's most dangerous industry.

I am fortunate to have extensive experience, over 30 years, in the four major areas that need to be dealt with by any municipality adopting a safety program for its taxi industry. They are industry experience, municipal government interaction, police expertise and direct involvement with companies developing safety technology.

I have been actively involved in the taxi industry in Toronto, Ontario, Canada for over 30 years. I own and operate a taxi and have managed a taxi brokerage where I was involved in every aspect of the daily operations. These experiences have enabled me to accurately determine what type of safety package and municipal regulations the industry needs to adopt.

From the year 1989 to 2000, I spearheaded and worked closely with the City of Toronto's Officials to form a safety package for the taxi industry. I am happy to report that the package was adopted in the year 2000 and was fully implemented by the end of 2001. It is very evident that elected officials and city regulators have an almost insurmountable task in setting rules and guidelines for any business requiring a city license. I became privy to the City Regulators' perspective in areas such as cost recovery, public perception and bylaw implementation. Do not despair; these issues can be resolved.

The process was entirely too long...eleven years! There is a strong need for regulators, as well as the taxi industry, to have a consistent approach when addressing safety issues. I now have that knowledge and can quickly adopt, streamline and implement a safety program for your city's taxi industry.

From 1988 to 2000, I had lengthy conversations with well over 10,000 taxi consumers. I certainly respected their input and know that I can deal professionally with their concerns. Their say must be valued, as their continual patronage is vital to the taxi driver's livelihood.

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It appears that their major concern is a loss of privacy when photographed in a taxi. Regardless of public opinion, Mr. Orwell's prediction of Big Brother is with us. It is estimated that the average person living in a large city is photographed approximately 25 to 40 times per day. This occurs in venues such as banks, convenience stores and government offices etc. When the entire process of camera security is explained to the taxi using public, I noted a dramatic change in their objections. The taxi industry is really the Johnny-come-lately in the implementation of security technology but it is the industry where it is most needed.

In 1997 the first digital camera specifically designed for use in a taxi in North America was installed in my taxi. It only took eight pictures, which I knew was not enough but technology hadn't quite arrived. Since that time, technology has moved forward in leaps and bounds and the clarity and capacity of the pictures is almost limitless. The equipment is affordable, cost effective and can be customized to any cities specifications.

If taxi safety is to be successful, you must have a strong police involvement. From 1965 to 1973, I was a police constable in the City of Toronto Ontario Canada. I know exactly what the police look for when investigating crimes that occur in this industry. I have been fortunate enough to work with the Toronto Police Department's original Taxi Project Manager, Detective Sergeant Brian Ward and I work closely with the present Project Manager Detective Sergeant Clive Richards. They, along with the entire Toronto Police Department are very supportive and heavily involved in our safety endeavours. I recommend you check out the Toronto Police department's crime stopper site at www.toronto-crimestoppers.com and check the column "Rob A Cab You Will Be Nabbed" which is dedicated to the Toronto taxi industry. There have been several arrests and convictions of criminals from this site.

Even though this is new ground we are breaking, we are beginning to see the fruits of our labours. There have been several criminal cases before the courts, which were the direct result of the adopted safety package and convictions were registered. The new technology especially the digital cameras has saved the police hundreds of investigative hours. There are regular meetings involving the Police, the taxi industry and city regulators to exchange ideas and information which will lead to an even safer working environment.

Personal involvement with this new, innovative technology has certainly made my workplace safer. To date, the courts have convicted two of my customers for criminal offenses. They were apprehended with the use of the digital camera images. At the end of 2004, Toronto's crime against taxi drivers has been reduced in excess of 60% in most major areas and armed robbery has dropped almost 70%.

It is time that cities worldwide understand the seriousness of this problem and takes the necessary steps to correct it. **NIOSH** (National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety) in the United States has estimated that taxi drivers are twenty times more likely to face vocational violence than any other job and are forty times more likely to face occupational homicide than any other workplace. They believe 85% will experience some form of victimization; 70% will be victims of crime; 35% will be robbed and 15% will have a weapon used against them and all this will occur during their career as a taxi driver.

A Canadian study done in 1996 called Fare Game – Fare Cop by assistant professor of criminology Phillip Stenning of the University of Toronto shows that taxi drivers also face the prospect of being murdered in their workplace at five times the rate of an on duty police officer. Not only do they face a twenty times more likely possibility of vocational violence but have a one in three chance of having a criminal act committed against them annually.

City regulation must be made mandatory as seen in major cities such as Toronto, New York, Sydney and Washington, who have acknowledged the seriousness of crime in their taxi industries and have legislated safety packages to protect their drivers. In legal circles this is called setting a precedent. With taxi safety information and technology readily available to every city, it would be advisable for any city operating a taxi industry to follow suit.

Does your city have legal and moral obligations to adopt safety legislation? Emphatically yes. You have safety regulations for virtually every other vocation. Why aren't there safety guidelines for the taxi industry? When addressing this issue don't follow another city's protocols, as they will have flaws that you do not want to inherit. Do the research with a professional in taxi safety and format a program customized to your needs

We'll say that your city does not have a safety package in place. The average taxi driver has no say in the choice of equipment placed in his taxi even though he pays the taxi owner/operator a fee to drive the vehicle. He also pays the municipality an annual licensing fee to drive taxi in the city. Would you not think there is a legal obligation for both the taxi owner/operator and the city to make sure that the taxi workplace is made as safe as possible? I have discussed this scenario with City Councilors and members of the legal profession. They agree there is a strong possibility that taxi owner/operators and cities could be found civilly liable, especially now that other municipalities worldwide have acknowledged the problem and adopted safety legislation for their taxi industries.

At the very least, the injured driver or his family would have to tap into local social programs, hospitalization, job retraining, etc. Don't you think an in-place safety package would be more cost effective than the possibility of losing a civil case that may cost your city hundreds of thousands of dollars?

The taxi industry is one of the most important and vital city industries. It is incumbent on City, Provincial/State or Federal Governments, to ensure a safe working environment for all taxi drivers. Don't you want your city to send a positive message that you care for all of your citizens? Safety is mandated in almost every other workplace. Shouldn't it also be mandatory in the most dangerous work area of all... the taxicab????

Whether I deal with a taxi brokerage, taxi unions or associations, city regulators or municipal government councilors I can bring all these factions together and coordinate a practical and responsible safety initiative for any city operating a taxi industry.

You now have technology and professionals that are available to assist you in achieving you safety goals. Do not delay in adopting taxi safety as every second you waste could cost a life. I invite you to check my website on taxi safety. I know you will find it informative and interesting – www.allstream.net/~ghmanley

I remain



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