

Tackling driver health together

Driver safety and health is a topic that has been debated at length by role players in the transport industry. It is no wonder that transport companies are forging alliances to combat this widespread cause for concern. A project aimed at educating drivers on the risks of HIV/AIDS and other related illnesses, **Trucking Wellness, is one such initiative**

On June 24 at a gathering of industry players at Mercedes Benz South Africa's (MBSA) majestic headquarters in Zwartkop, Gauteng, an agreement was finalised between MBSA and the South African Business Coalition on HIV/AIDS (SABCOHA). They agreed to hand over R4,5 million to Trucking Wellness in the course of the next three years.

Kobus van Zyl, vice president of commercial vehicles for MBSA, said that MBSA had decided to further its role in corporate social responsibility as HIV/AIDS is still the most pertinent issue in South Africa and a cause well worth supporting. Brad Mears, chief executive officer of SABCOHA, pointed out that this sort of generosity should not be downplayed but rather advertised in the hope that others will follow suit.

Trucking Wellness is designed to promote HIV/AIDS and STI awareness, and offer counselling and treatment for long distance truck drivers, commercial sex workers and communities around various official truck stops. There are 20 wellness centres and five mobile wellness units strategically located throughout the country along major transport routes.

Managed by the Corridor Empowerment Project (CEP), the Trucking Wellness clinics operate mostly at night and offer their services free of charge in a safe and confidential environment. Trucking Wellness was initiated as a joint project called Trucking Against AIDS, run by various South African road freight companies, trade unions and government, and was co-funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). That operation has since evolved into Trucking Wellness.

SABCOHA and Trucking Wellness plan to test 10 000 drivers this year. They have already tested over 3 000 using their mobile clinics. Most of the comfortable and homely clinics are housed in specially adapted 12 m freight containers, each staffed by a professional nurse and co-ordinator.

Sickly drivers suffering from TB, high blood pressure, diabetes, colds and flu, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV related conditions could contribute to a poor level of health in a driver, which adversely affects his performance. The purpose of Trucking Wellness is to improve the overall health and well being of the country's drivers and reduce the

Pictured at MBSA's donation handover to Trucking Wellness, were MBSA's Kobus van Zyl (centre), SABCOHA's Brad Mears (second from right) and Trucking Wellness's Tertius Wessels (third from left).



potential for driver "down time" and accidents. Louis Hollander, HR Director for Imperial Logistics said, "Employee drivers that are not healthy are a major risk towards not only themselves, but also to other road users. Absenteeism and employee replacement costs adversely affect companies."

"There is definitely a moral high ground to be taken here," explains Con Roux, commercial manager of the N3 toll concession, which is also involved with Trucking Wellness. "The consequences of driver ill health are a major problem for the industry. By getting involved with Trucking Wellness, a transport operator is strides ahead of its competitors who aren't involved, in terms of social responsibility."

Support and motivation by the employer is also an integral part of Trucking Wellness' continued success. "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 acknowledgment from within the industry for being a company that cares about its employees," explains Tony D'Almeida, a specialist for UTI's People Partnership Department.

Donations from the likes of MBSA and others will continue to make this multipartner initiative workable and effective going forward. ■



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