

Are big retailers ensuring online shopping drivers remain alcohol-free on the roads amid the ecommerce boom in SA

By Rhys Evans

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Whether on the road or in the workplace, alcohol testing is required by law for the safety of others. When the road is the workplace for businesses that contract drivers to collect, deliver or fulfil orders, it is essential that these companies ensure a strict alcohol testing procedure is in place.



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Just as an intoxicated worker is a danger, especially when operating power tools or heavy machinery, an intoxicated delivery driver is a danger both to themselves, and other road users. Taking steps to ensure that even outsourced drivers remain alcohol-free on the road is a critical risk mitigation measure that companies must take now, before it's too late.

Not only is it important to prevent harm to drivers, other road users and their vehicles, it is also critical to prevent the reputational damage that will follow if a driver is involved in an accident and is found to be intoxicated. This implicates the company for which the delivery was being made, and the cost of reputational damage is much higher than medical bills and vehicle repairs.

No place for alcohol in the workplace

Consuming alcohol has a negative impact on coordination, sight, speech and reaction speed; all of which are exceptionally hazardous when that individual is operating machinery or driving a vehicle, whether on four wheels or two. Employees under the influence of alcohol are a danger to themselves, others and their employer. According to the South African Labour Guide, 20 to 25% of workplace injuries were attributable to employees under the influence of alcohol, while a recent World Health Organisation Global Status Report on Road Safety noted that at least 60% of South African road deaths are caused by alcohol consumption.

Delivering, safely

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing measures, South Africans have largely switched to online shopping, and e-commerce in South Africa has matured rapidly as a result, leading to higher numbers of delivery and

courier drivers on the road which means a greater risk of accidents. A clear company policy that communicates a zero-tolerance approach to alcohol consumption is necessary whenever employees are on the road. This policy must provide details of how it will be enforced along with the consequences of failure to comply, and this is generally done through workplace breathalyser testing.

Where companies are outsourcing deliveries to on-demand drivers, it should still be that company's responsibility to ensure the safety of their deliveries, which extends to ensuring that drivers collecting orders from them should be tested for alcohol. When drivers are making return trips to pick up new orders, it is essential that they are tested for alcohol on their breath before they are allowed to get back on the road. Through consistent, regular testing it is possible to have a deterrent effect in that drivers are deterred from consuming alcohol during working hours, knowing that they're likely to get caught on their rounds.

The solution is simple

When a driver reports to pick up a package, they should be tested on a rapid test breathalyser by the person doing the hand over or a supervisor. The process is simple taking less than 10 seconds, ensuring a sober driver is going back on to the road. Courier companies, transport companies and logistical companies require their workers and drivers to be tested for alcohol before allowing them on the road. Why should drivers' delivering parcels on behalf of retailers not be held to the same level of road safety?

The dangers of alcohol and accidents

Ordinarily, where an employee is injured, medical costs would be covered by the Compensation Fund or the employer's insurance if the injury occurred during the scope and course of the individual's job. However, where the accident results from intoxication, the employee will be barred from claiming benefits and will have to pay for medical expenses out of their own pocket. Where there was damage to company property (such as a vehicle and its contents) the insurer will not pay out where alcohol is involved. This leaves the company with a hefty repair bill for their vehicle, and possibly a liability claims from third parties for injury and damages.

Accidents also cost the company in downtime while the driver is absent from work, recovering, and the vehicle is out of action in the repair shop. All of these costs are minor, when compared to the potential cost of reputational damage of an accident scene photograph with company branding doing the rounds on social media, or on the front page of the daily newspaper.

Regular testing keeps everyone safe

The safest and most effective way of keeping drivers alcohol-free on duty? Breath testing by means of a breathalyser is fast and inexpensive, accurate and unobtrusive. Having that zero-tolerance alcohol policy and strict testing procedure in place is a logical means to achieve peace of mind for e-commerce companies, knowing that they've done everything in their power to ensure their deliveries are not being carried out by intoxicated drivers. The method is tried and proven to be effective in industries across the country and it needs to be implemented by online retailers as soon as possible.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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