How to Start a Fleet Safety Program

Earn trust, get driver buy-in, and make safety stick











About this guide

Fleet managers know safety is important. According to our recent survey, 93% of fleet managers said their teams perform better when safety is a top priority. But despite this, one-third of respondents don't have a formal safety program.

The biggest barrier? Many fleet managers believe they don't have the time, budget, or buy-in to launch a program that works, and that they are able to maintain.

But getting started doesn't require you to have a perfected and rigid plan. In fact, that actually may cause more harm than good. Instead, creating a safety program that works usually just requires getting started, and being willing to fine tune the process along the way.

We partnered with Sam Watts, a longtime fleet safety expert and founder of Wattsmen Diesel House to help you implement a safety program that works, and is supported by everyone involved. Sam's worked with fleets of all sizes to build safety programs that actually stick. He has been in the trenches with the day-to-day processes, performed safety audits, and created customized safety programs. With his help, we've pulled together the key questions you need to ask (and answer) to launch a program that drivers buy into, support staff can manage, and leadership can stand behind.



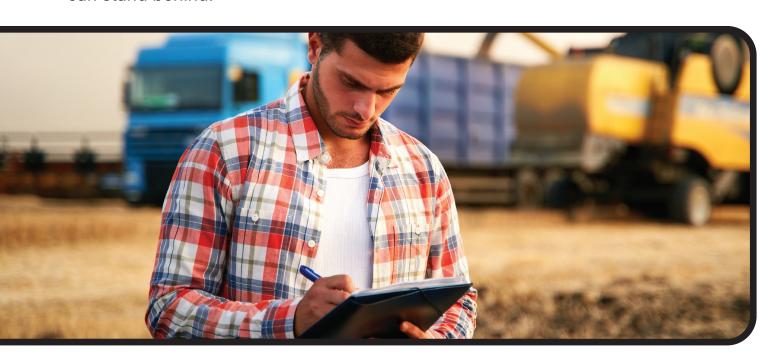


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Getting started

Successfully converting an entire fleet to a new vehicle safety program requires a lot more than adding some shiny new gadget to the mix. It takes extensive preparation, refined processes, employee buy-in, and well...after all that sometimes it does still take a shiny new gadget, but the other elements are really the bedrock foundation.

In truth, a safety program can fail to take root even when equipped with the ideal suite of tools and SOPs. Too often these programs are rolled out in a single all-hands meeting with little notice and even less buy-in from drivers, or they rely too much on data nobody knows how to interpret, or they gain a reputation for being replaced every year anyway, so why bother?

Many of these plans are great on paper but never make it past that kickoff meeting. And that's too bad, because a working safety program — defined here as one that lowers incident rates and generally makes organizations more pleasant to work for — is a priority that 93% of fleet managers agree benefits their teams' overall performance.

Whether you're starting from scratch or fine-tuning a safety program that's already in motion, **this guide covers how to:**

93%

of fleet managers agree a strong safety program improves team performance.



Identify who within your organization is responsible for instilling a lasting safety effort



Focus on the most urgent and fixable risks



Train your team on new tools and policies with clarity and consistency



Earn the required buy-in from drivers, dispatchers and everyone directly impacted by the program

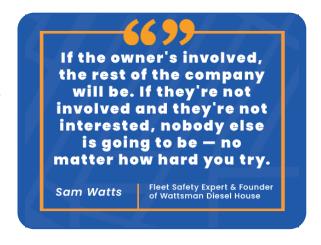


Measure success without getting lost in the metrics

Who are our decision makers?

Even the most expertly-crafted vehicle safety program is unlikely to make much of an impact if your safety director is the only one interested in professing its virtues. Your program (or any program, really) needs **organizational buy-in** before it can ever take shape.

That generally requires the following:

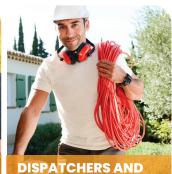




Being involved (and invested) in the safety program's development and execution.



Having a clear understanding of how new procedures will affect scheduling, routing and workflow.



Working together to identify persistent problem areas and coaching drivers accordingly.

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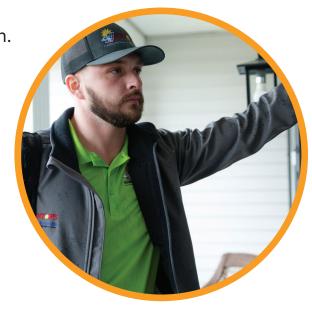


Working to consistently communicate and enforce any policy changes affected by your new program.

Don't forget about your drivers

Drivers know where the near-misses happen. They know which policies are followed and which tend to be fudged a bit, or ignored outright. They'll be the ones whose habits and behaviors are being asked to change.

If you're planning on implementing new software, tools, or processes that directly affect how drivers do their jobs, one might find it prudent to *ask them how they feel about that*. Always allow drivers to review training plans, pilot tech, and give feedback on new policies. You'll get better ideas — and better adoption.



What are our top safety priorities?

If you're constructing a safety program that aims to monitor every behavior and eliminate every conceivable risk by adopting every feature seen in every vendor demo, we're going to strongly recommend you think twice. It's not feasible, scalable, and you're going to meet resistance from your team.

Safety programs that aim to tackle everything at once risk overwhelming staff and confusing drivers who'd much rather just keep doing things how they've always been done. Rather than spreading a program too thin to do anything well, narrow the focus a bit.

Examine your organization's weak points

Every fleet has a different risk profile; carriers specializing in long-haul trucking will probably face different challenges than a local operation offering final-mile dry van deliveries or a service business focused on completing a day's worth of jobs. You need to know which specific challenges your program needs to address, which means **checking into the following:**

- Your own incident and claims data
- Near-misses and driver-reported hazards
- DOT inspection results and CSA scores
- Industry benchmarks (as a reference, not a template)

For any safety program to really move the needle, it has to account for risks that are *a)* frequent and *b)* preventable. Armed with data from the sources above, see which of these common safety concerns best fit that bill for your organization:

- Speeding and harsh acceleration
- Distracted driving (phones, in-cab screens, fatigue)
- Following distance and tailgating
- Improper securement or load balance
- Backing and low-speed maneuvering
- Hours-of-Service compliance and fatigue management
- Injury prevention on loading docks or warehouse yards



If 80% of your incidents involve backing collisions in yards, don't spend all your time chasing harsh braking events. Focus on what's hurting your people, your equipment, or your reputation the most. Picking 2–3 safety priorities helps everyone stay aligned — and lets you prove quick wins that build momentum for bigger changes.

What's our plan for training employees on new policies?

In all likelihood your program will evolve throughout the early stages of its adoption, which is totally fine — we'd argue no safety program can make any real impact without first seeking direct feedback from drivers anyway, so don't sweat it if some of the finer details are technically still in beta.

The important thing is to communicate any noticeable changes early on and give drivers and support staff a chance to be heard. Our recent safety survey revealed 84% of fleet managers believe their employees would openly embrace safety technology that works to protect them from harm — so long as they're kept in the loop.

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Hammer home the training right away. Train the drivers.
Train the dispatchers.
There's going to be hiccups at the beginning...
training is going to be the most important part.

Sam Watts

Don't leave anyone wondering what procedures or tools are changing or (worse) questioning why these things need changing at all. Instead, make sure drivers and support staff understand the goals of your program and feel confident using any of the tools required.

Life is much easier with support staff on your side

You'll notice we keep emphasizing how critical it is you earn buy-in from drivers and support staff, and for good reason.

Dispatchers and other frontline roles need to know how new tools work, what kind of alerts or reports they'll be dealing with, and how their conversations with drivers can better support safety goals (rather than unknowingly undercutting them). If dispatch pressures a driver to ignore safety guidelines or forgo using a new reporting tool, it's doubtful drivers are going to put much faith in any proposed changes to safety SOPs.

For this reason, it can be helpful to designate someone on your team as the go-to resource for any new technology or SOP you're rolling out. It doesn't have to be an IT specialist, and it definitely doesn't need to be a whole committee — just someone who communicates well and sees the benefits of learning the system enough to help with questions.

Give people a chance to ask questions

Here's a pro-tip for encouraging employee buy-in: when presenting an organization-wide vehicle safety program that will almost certainly impact the daily routines of most in attedance, allot for plenty of time for questions and concerns.

Field those questions. Hear their concerns.

Give everyone time to digest. Explain how you'll be providing support. Make it clear this isn't just a passing fad, it's a priority that benefits everyone in the company, regardless of their role.



And when it comes to support, make sure any processes or technology you choose also provides onboarding support so you can hit the ground running. There are going to be questions you can't answer, but look for products like Linxup that offer help in a way that works best for you and your team and have U.S. based support — helping you get resolution faster. Whether it's chat, phone, or email, make sure you have access to ways to get technical help, even in off hours because odds are, problems are going to pop up when it's most inconvenient for everyone.

Provide training that "sticks"

People are far more likely to engage with a safety program when they understand why changes to present SOPs and tools are necessary.

This is a great time for some "show don't tell" training with real-world examples. Use your own incident footage when possible (with identifying details removed; public shaming isn't generally a winning coaching strategy), and tailor example scenarios to challenges relevant to your fleet (city driving, mountain grades, tight docks and so on).

Strive to keep trainings hyperfocused on one safety component at a time — it's easier to recall a focused 10-minute training than a broad-spectrum 60-minute marathon.

When it comes to establishing or revamping safety policies, use plain language ("No texting while driving" beats "Drivers shall abstain from mobile communications while operating a motor vehicle" every time) and be sure they're easy to locate (printed copies in trucks, access via app).

Which tools are needed to support the program?

There's no shortage of safety tech out there; dash cams, sensors, alerts, apps, dashboards, Al-this and machine-learning-that. But the best tools aren't necessarily the ones with the most features — they're the ones your team will actually use.

Rather than wasting time and energy (and, you know, money) on tools and systems for which your team has zero need, let's break down the main safety tech categories and how to find which one best suits your needs. Everybody needs good dash cams.



Your first little fender bender will pay for every dash cam in your fleet.

Sam Watts

Common safety tools (by category)

You don't necessarily need all of these right from the jump, but it's worth knowing which categories align most closely with your program's primary goal.

- Dash cams (dual-facing or road-facing): Help reconstruct events, coach behavior, and (this is a big one) protect against false claims. Our recent safety survey found 88% of fleet managers say dash cams helped reduce or defend against accident claims, yet only 72% of companies currently utilize dash cameras in work vehicles.
- **Driver behavior monitoring systems:** Track speeding, harsh braking, lane deviation, tailgating, and other unsafe driving habits (often through telematics or integrated platforms).
- Real-time alerts and coaching software: In-cab feedback to help correct issues in the moment (e.g., following too closely, not wearing a seatbelt).
 Cosistent ongoing <u>driver coaching</u> also lets you use data to show real trends and behaviors that are problematic for safety and savings.
- Telematics & GPS fleet tracking: Useful for route review, identifying unsafe areas and measuring idling or time in high-risk zones.
- Mobile apps for drivers: Give drivers access to safety scores, videos, and feedback in real time.
- Learning Management Systems (LMS): Deliver and track training across your fleet (often in bite-sized formats).

Which gear most directly addresses your pressing needs?

Do a quick spot-check of your top safety priorities. Odds are good the areas in which you could use some significant improvement naturally lend themselves to certain safety gear:

- Backing collisions? Check out dual-facing cameras, proximity sensors, or training modules.
- Distracted driving? Could be a job for Al-powered dash cams with real-time alerts.
- **Driver fatigue?** Time to explore hours-of-service monitoring systems.

Let your priorities guide your tools, not the other way around. Otherwise, you'll end up with gear that solves problems you don't actually have (which...actually kind of creates new problems, if you think about it).

Bear in mind that lots of reporting tools aim to be all-in-one systems. Fuel reports, DVIRs, maintenance tracking, CSA scores, and so on can often be consolidated into a single system's dashboard, which means only one login to remember and one interface to learn, which is nice and feels less overwhelming for you and your team.

Include drivers in the tool evaluation process

There is a simple method of circumventing the issue of acquiring tools that no one actually likes or will use: let your drivers demo things first and provide feedback.

Maybe the tool you've identified is a perfect fit on paper — but if the interface makes no sense, or if drivers are irritated by its alerts and feel a strong urge to fling it out of the cab at 65mph after less than a week of use, then it's not a good fit, simple as that. Tech is only valuable to your safety program if it gets used.

When shopping around, ask vendors the following:

- Will this integrate with our current systems?
- Can you help us customize the reporting to align with our biggest problem areas?
- What's your average client adoption rate after 90 days?
- What support do you provide for rollout and training?
- How do you handle false alerts or disputed events?

How do we ensure our tech solution matches our goals?

You've tested some cool new safety tech and your drivers have reached a consensus on which tools they like best — excellent! It's all installed and integrated and ready to go — great news! But really, you're just getting started.

It turns out access to raw data doesn't actually fix bad driving habits, at least not on its own. To get the most out of your safety initiatives (including both tools and your program's SOPs), you've got to make sure your entire team knows what success on this front actually looks like.

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Policies are going to shift once you understand what the new software can do.

Sam Watts

Identify your most important metrics

You zeroed in on your top safety priorities; now, pick 1–2 key metrics for each to measure how your program is impacting those areas.

- If your priority is distracted driving, track alert frequency from in-cab cameras or phone usage violations.
- If your priority is following distance, track how often tailgating alerts are triggered.
- If your priority is backing collisions, monitor incident counts or near-miss reports in tight spaces.

You get the idea — whatever the priority may be, find a KPI that is both trackable and actionable.

Track those metrics in a dashboard

Most vendors will give you a dashboard where you'll see an overview of the data your tool of choice is designed to obtain.

If your dashboard isn't helping you see whether the metrics selected above are trending in the right direction, or identifying which routes/terminals need some extra attention, or flagging drivers who are increasing in dangerous activity, you either need to customize your view or get a new dashboard.

Additionally, the majority of these platforms allow you to filter by terminal, driver group, time period, and event type — use these to filter out any data you don't need. Often these interfaces can be overwhelmingly granular, but with clear safety goals in mind and 1-2 KPIs picked out ahead of time, they can become much more easily digestible.

Use your dashboard to identify and address key concerns

It's one thing to say, "Driver X had six harsh braking events this week." It's another to ask why — was it traffic? Bad routing? Tailgating? Poor training? Until you understand the why, the number doesn't help you improve anything. Our recommendation is to allow data to guide the following steps:

- Focus weekly reviews on just one or two common safety issues
- Look at broader trends on a month-to-month basis
- Discuss these trends as a team, both positive and negative
- Give driver managers clarity on where to focus their coaching
- Give drivers insight into how they can improve and how you plan to help them

Train each group on what the data means for their role. This makes the program feel like a team effort — not just something the safety department nags them about.

The Linxup Coaching Dashboard lets you see what's trending, where you should focus your training, and even set up reports to monitor progress over time based on your priorities. You can customize your view and track communication so everyone is on the same page, all of the time.



It's ok if your primary safety concerns shift

Maybe you kick things off with a company-wide focus on backing incidents. Six months in, if that issue pales in comparison to some new hazard (like harsh cornering), that's good! It means your program is working and ready to evolve.

Revisit your metrics quarterly or biannually to make sure they still align with your biggest risks and adjust things accordingly.

How can we prepare support staff for long-term success?

By now we've established why it's not enough to simply toss everyone a policy packet (or a binder, or a soon-to-be-forever-lost PDF attachment) and hope they just absorb it.

Long-term success comes from helping every branch of your organization understand what your safety program is about, and how they might play a role in its execution. Cliche though it may sound, your org's commitment to safety is only as strong as its weakest link:



Get serious about providing regular driver feedback

Don't assume everyone knows how to take all the data fueling your new safety dashboard and turn it into productive conversations just because they've been promoted. Coaching is a skill just like any other, it takes training and practice to consistently deliver driver feedback in the right way (the way that motivates rather than demoralizes).

Start each day with a quick reminder of your primary safety focus, include a short KPI report in weekly scorecards or staff updates, and be sure to celebrate any relevant wins publicly (e.g., a full week without camera alerts, positive driver feedback, or even an incentive like gift cards). This goes a long way toward a) telling your team you're serious about all this safety business and b) showing them you recognize the effort they're putting in.

Set a clear coaching roadmap with simple SOPs

If everyone has to reinvent the wheel every time there's an incident, it's unlikely your desired safety changes will take hold for long. Building clear SOPs for the following will go a long way towards supporting drivers and driver managers:

- Handling a camera event or unsafe behavior report
- Scheduling follow-up training or coaching
- Documenting incidents and corrective actions
- Escalating repeated safety violations

These will keep expectations for your drivers clear and coaching from your support staff more consistent. Plus, continuous training, feedback, and recognition keeps everyone informed that this renewed focus on safety isn't just some passing phase.

Creating scorecards (like with Linxup reports) highlighting milestones (like alert-free days or increased improvement percentages) help you re-inforce the purpose of a safety program and boost overall morale on why everyone's cooperation is important.



How do we test our safety program's ease-of-use?

An aspect of a working safety program worth mentioning in this modern age is the importance of it being mobile-friendly; in short, if you can't run your safety tools from your phone, you're going to fall behind. The right platform should let you:

- Review incidents and driver alerts in real time
- Coach drivers from anywhere (even between stops)
- Access video clips and GPS data on the fly
- View safety scores and trends (without needing a desktop login)
- Push training materials and updates out to drivers in seconds

Remember that all drivers come from an assortment of backgrounds. Some are tech-savvy; others might use their smartphone primarily as a coaster. With that in mind, your safety program and any of its associated tools, gadgets, or software should be reasonably intuitive (that means no manual required).

This goes for your managers and dispatchers too; the more intuitive your system is, the less training (and retraining) you'll need. Before you buy any system, test it on your phone — or better yet, ask a less tech-confident team member to do the same. If they can't figure it out fast, move on.

Avoid systems that anchor you to the office

Legacy systems might have all the features in the world, but if they require local servers, desktop-only access, a VPN just to log in or (worse) a separate app for every feature, you're adding complexity where you need simplicity.

Modern fleets don't operate from cubicles. Your safety tools should be cloud-based, mobile-ready, and built for a team that's on the move. Plus, as a nice bonus perk, drivers tend to be more likely to engage with safety programs and understand expectations when they can easily access their own safety scores and complete training right from their phones.

How do we help drivers buy into a new program?

If drivers see your safety initiatives as little more than a surveillance system designed to micromanage or cut pay, those initiatives will fall flat pretty fast.

Let them give honest feedback and help shape the rollout. Explain how any new data will be used, and be upfront about what the tools do and why they're needed. Transparency is the key — there should be no surprises when your safety program finally goes "live."

Provide constructive coaching

There are right and wrong ways to give safety feedback. Public callouts, rushed conversations, and/or handing someone a printout with "coachable event" circled in red would be considered the wrong way.



authoritarian figure they're not going to listen to you, they're going to tune you out. I like to get a little pocket of drivers and say. 'Hey, this is what we're thinking. What are your thoughts?"

Sam Watts

The right way usually involves regularly scheduled 1:1s to discuss both wins and areas in need of improvement. Don't just book a 1:1 every time a driver needs a firm talking to, or they'll quickly associate "coaching" with getting chewed out. Instead, consider the following:

- Shout out "incident-free" streaks or strong safety scores
- Share positive stories from the road (e.g., a driver who avoided a major collision thanks to textbook defensive driving)
- Offer incentives for safe driving: paid time off, gift cards, company swag, whatever you've got access to. Sure, this is getting a little close to outright bribery, but when it comes to safety if it works it works

Make recognition part of your routine, not just a once-a-year awards ceremony.

Listen

Drivers have ideas, concerns and frustrations, especially when their established habits and routines are disrupted. Give them a chance to provide input, be it through anonymous surveys or regular chats with driver reps and safety/ops.

If you want your safety program to take flight, here's the key: act on what you hear.

Nothing erodes trust faster than asking for input only to ignore it. Keep your coaching respectful and show genuine receptiveness to drivers' concerns, and pretty soon drivers will start seeing the mutual benefits of a working safety program.

What are the most common safety program pitfalls?

Pitfall #1: "Set it and forget it"

You rolled out new training, installed cameras, sent out policy updates... and then moved on to the next project. Programs that fizzle shortly after launch usually lack clear plans for ongoing coaching and follow-up, which inevitably leads to an apathetic approach to any desired changes.

How to fix it: Build recurring safety check-ins into your regular operations, including weekly huddles, coaching sessions, and driver feedback reviews. Make it a habit, not a campaign.

Pitfall #2: "I will simply throw tech at this problem"

Technology helps, sure — but without the requisite buy-in from team members and a thorough exploration of the "why" discussed above, your safety program risks resembling a surveillance system for drivers to resent. Introducing a new tool without a plan for training and adoption is also a really a good way to end up with a mess of dashboards serving very little purpose.

How to fix it: Make sure your people are engaged from the start as you locate which tools are worth investing in, and do your best to consolidate your tech needs into as few logins as possible.

Pitfall #3: "I will only follow up on these safety changes some of the time"

One driver gets coached for speeding; another does the same but no one follows up. One fleet manager is strict, another doesn't bother. This kind of inconsistency makes any program feel arbitrary.

How to fix it: Use standard processes for flagging, coaching and documenting events. Train managers across fleets and locations to respond the same way. Safety programs should make enforcement of the rules fair and predictable.







Pitfall #4: "I'll just assume everyone understands and is on board with this"

Safety programs often suffer from mixed messages, or a general lack of communication altogether. Drivers aren't told why a new policy exists, support staff doesn't understand how tools work, leadership only hears about safety when something goes wrong — these are all signs of a communication breakdown, which can be fatal to any initiative you hope to launch.

How to fix it: Communicate constantly, in plain language and through multiple channels — including meetings, text alerts, emails and app updates when applicable. Make it clear that everyone is in the loop.

Pitfall #5: Ignoring a driver's perspective

Rolling out tools or policies without involving drivers almost always leads to pushback. They're the ones behind the wheel — if they're not bought in, your program will stall.

How to fix it: Involve drivers in demos, training design and policy development. Let them help shape the program and reward their input.

Pitfall #6: Measuring the wrong stuff

This bears repeating: if your program is built around collecting data no one understands or uses, it won't help anyone (in fact, access to data you don't use can even hurt you in some cases). Make sure whichever measurement tools you use (including in-the-cab hardware, software systems and your dashboard) align with your primary safety objectives.

How to fix it: Limit your tracked KPIs to those few that matter most. Share them with the team. Track progress on your dashboard and filter out all the other noise. Adjust as needed.

Pitfall #7: Equating coaching with verbal reprimands

Survey data reveals 73% of fleet managers believe drivers overestimate their own safety performance. That leaves a lot of room for improvement via smart coaching, which drivers should (theoretically) look forward to since it helps them level up their skillset and improves their odds of returning home from every trip safely. However, if "coaching" leads drivers to dread training or 1:1s, they'll stop engaging.

How to fix it: Coach consistently, respectfully and privately. Be quick to recognize and commend improvement. Focus on problem-solving, not blame.

Remember that safety is a long game. Success or failure doesn't hinge on avoiding every misstep. A vehicle safety program's job is to uncover those blind spots that really matter, then provide actionable ways to fix them and keep moving forward.

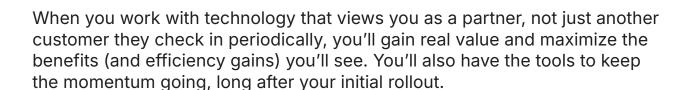
How should the program's success be determined?

Your program doesn't need to check every box on day one. In fact, you can still expect some early hiccups in adopting and integrating these changes into your org's day-to-day, but with a solid plan in place you should see reductions in speeding, harsh events, preventable incidents or other areas you've chosen to emphasize within 30-90 days.

Perhaps the clearest proof of program success is whether those positive trends endure. You've achieved success if, say one year from now, these changes are no longer considered part of a "safety initiative" — they're just a reflection of how your team handles its business.

Safety program launch recap:

- You've identified your decision makers
- You know your top safety priorities
- You've built a plan for training and policy
- You've chosen the right tools
- You've aligned your tools with real goals
- Your support staff is trained and ready
- Your drivers are bought in
- You've avoided the common pitfalls
- You've defined what success looks like and how to prove it









Improving vehicle safety with Linxup coaching sessions

Though building a safety program is no easy task, keeping it running is where fleets tend to need the most support. That's why we built the Linxup coaching dashboard — a simple, powerful way to help commercial fleets identify risky driving behavior, track performance over time, recognize improvements and reduce repeat incidents.

Our Linxup coaching sessions will also work directly with your safety team to:

- Review your current setup
- Identify and prioritize reducing your most urgent risks
- Customize your dashboard
- Build a plan that fits your fleet

Whether you're rolling out a brand-new safety program or revamping one that's lost steam, we're here to make sure it sticks.

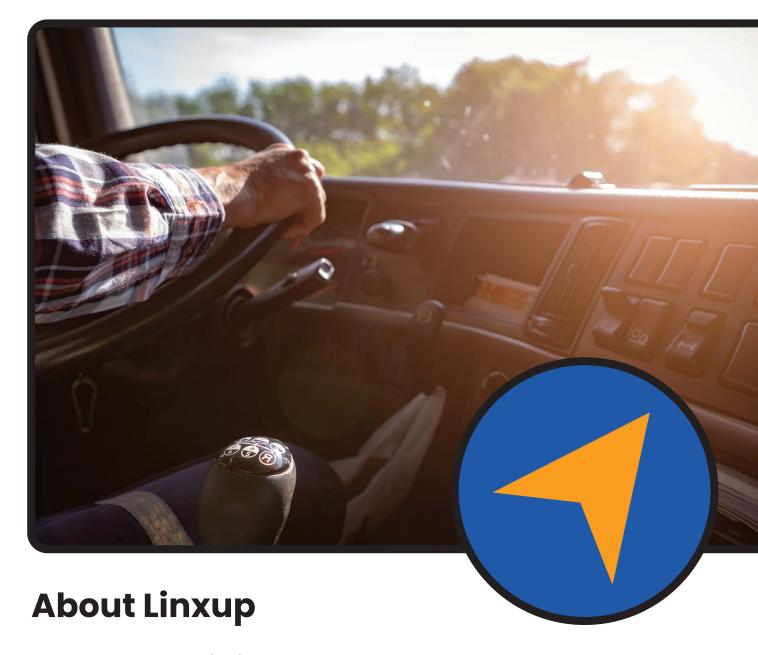




Who is Sam Watts?

Born and raised in the trucking industry, Sam Watts knows firsthand what it takes to keep fleets safe, compliant, and running strong. As a fleet safety expert and founder of Wattsmen Diesel House, he and his team provide hands-on safety and compliance training for fleets of all sizes. Wattsmen Diesel House helps fleets stay DOT and FMCSA compliant through safety policy development and implementation, driver coaching, and scheduled safety audits and inspections.

Whether he's helping fleets establish a new safety program, reviving a current one, or scaling due to growth, Sam's mission is to create solid foundations for a safety culture that sticks.



Linxup makes it easy for field-based businesses to get the most out of their vehicles, equipment, and workers in the field.

Linxup solutions connect through one easy-to-use app that centralizes vehicle tracking, dash cam monitoring, equipment tracking, and tool tracking. That means quick access to critical information to improve the safety, security, productivity, and efficiency of every vehicle, asset, tool, and employee. Linxup's ease of use, fast onboarding, reliability, flexible terms, and U.S. based customer support make our solutions ideal for small and medium-sized businesses, while delivering the reliability and powerful insights required by larger enterprises.

Based in St. Louis, Missouri, since its founding in 2004, Linxup is dedicated to delivering useful innovation and personalized, US based coaching and support to empower our customers' success.



