J.A. Montgomery CONSULTING

SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN

UTILITY VEHICLE OPERATION & TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

Utility vehicles (UV) are a common tool used by many public agencies. Their convenience and flexibility can make them essential to a facility's operations. They are often used to transport visitors and employees, carry maintenance and landscaping equipment, and even respond to first aid incidents and provide initial transport of injured or ill patients. While UVs may appear innocuous, they can be very dangerous when operated inappropriately or without adequate training.

The safe operation of utility vehicles starts with the employer selecting a model with the necessary capabilities. Golf carts are often repurposed for work at public facilities. This may or may not be appropriate. They were designed for two golfers traveling short distances with two sets of golf clubs. This capability may not be adequate for two employees, their equipment, tools, and supplies, such as bags of fertilizer, pails of paint, or similar heavy loads. When selecting a utility vehicle, employers should consider the vehicle's weight-carrying capacity, tires, and suspension for its intended use.

Utility vehicles are involved in many accidents each year that result in personal injury, death, and property damage. Unfortunately, New Jersey public employers have experienced such incidents. Due to their lightweight, high center of gravity, suspension system, and small tires, they can easily tip over. They are even more prone to tipping over when used on rough, uneven, or sloped terrain. Public agency leaders must evaluate whether utility vehicles have the capabilities and safety features needed for the tasks they will be asked to perform.

- **What is the maximum anticipated weight of riders, tools, equipment, and supplies?** Do a rough calculation of your workers and the weight of anticipated loads.
- **What is the weight capacity of the UV being considered for purchase or rental?** Check the owner's manual or do an internet search. How does it compare to the anticipated load you calculated? Please include a safety factor.
- **Over what types of surfaces will the UV be used?** Unpaved or uneven surfaces will have an impact on the safety factor of carrying heavy loads.
- **What are the seating and cargo-carrying arrangements?** All riders must be seated in a designated riding area. Are the riding seats provided with seatbelts? Does the cargo bed have space and tie-downs for your anticipated loads?

While the design of utility vehicles may make them more prone to accidents, driver error is the leading cause of accidents. An employer may believe that if an UV operator has a driver's license, they are qualified to safely operate a utility vehicle. Driving a car and driving a UV are different skills and require different knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Only properly trained employees should operate a utility vehicle. A comprehensive operating policy, training program, and driver selection process are essential to reducing accidents and injuries. To assist our members, the Safety Director has provided a model policy and training program at Written Programs (Policies).

Agencies that use a UV or are considering purchasing a UV should review the model policy and training forms. Alter them to suit your operations and specific UV by referencing the owner's manual.