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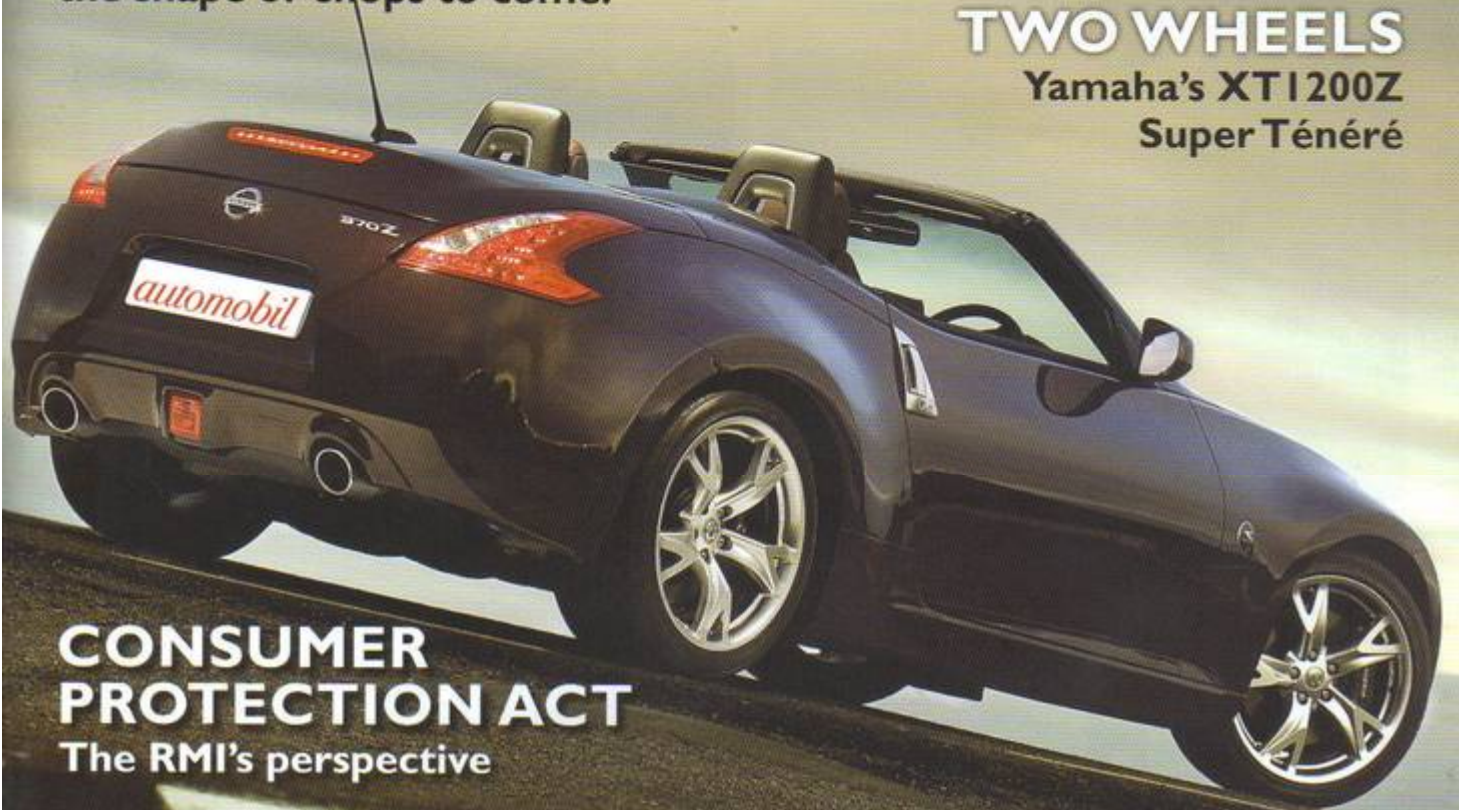
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Truck driver well-being is a transport industry priority. Chris Reilly reports

Healthy and happy truck drivers provide numerous benefits to the road freight industry. They are more alert, reliable and responsible, ensuring that their vehicles and cargoes reach their destinations intact and on time.

A sickly driver is more at risk of being involved in an accident, incurring major costs to the employer and their insurer through loss of the vehicle, trailer and cargo. If a sick driver is killed in an accident, although tragic, his employer is faced with the further cost of recruiting and training a replacement driver.

One of the mechanisms that help to keep truck drivers healthy on South Africa's many major transport routes are the 20 *in situ* wellness centres and five mobile wellness units strategically located throughout the country.

Most trucking accidents in South Africa are attributed to driver fatigue – a common problem in the industry. However, this is not the only cause. Sickly drivers suffering from TB, high blood pressure, diabetes, colds and flu, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV-related conditions can contribute to a poor level of health in a driver, which adversely affects his performance.

The purpose of Trucking Well-ness is to improve the overall health and wellbeing of the country's drivers and reduce the potential for driver downtime and accidents.

Trucking Wellness started out 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 evolved into Trucking Wellness as it is known today.

The Trucking Wellness project is designed to create HIV/AIDS and STI awareness among long-distance truck drivers, commercial sex workers and the communities around the various truck stops, as well as to provide the necessary counselling and treatment.

Managed by the Corridor Empowerment Project (CEP), Trucking Wellness clinics operate mostly after hours and offer a number of services to drivers free of charge and in a safe and confidential environment.

Most of the comfortable and homely clinics



Co-ordinator Tsaneng "Paulus" Mathane and nurse Haba "Samuel" Moloi, stationed at the Trucking Wellness clinic near Villiers off the N3 highway

driver illness



Trucking Wellness clinics are a convenient and vital component of the national driver health strategy



Most Trucking Wellness clinics are placed in or near to truck stops and fuel depots, some of which have restaurants and shower facilities

are built into specially adapted 12-metre freight containers, each staffed by a professional nurse and co-ordinator, where drivers can get treatment for a variety of health problems – from backache and flu to high blood pressure.

More importantly, drivers are encouraged to be counselled and tested for HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. CareWorks provides confidential counselling, pathology tests and appropriate anti-retroviral treatment for HIV positive drivers if necessary through the Wellness Fund.

Since the project was launched by the National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight Industry (NBCRFI) in 1999, clinic services have expanded to provide education, primary healthcare, food supplements, condom distribution, voluntary HIV testing, as well as referral to the treatment service provider, CareWorks.

"If even one employee passes away as a result of an accident, in addition to the financial implications of the loss of the family breadwinner, the emotional loss felt by both the employee's family and his / her colleagues at work also has huge impact on the company.

"Also as a result of an accident, the insurance

TRUCKING WELLNESS

costs in the Retirement Funds Risk premiums are raised at additional financial cost to the members of the various Industry Funds," says Tony D'Almeida, a specialist for the People Partnership Department at UTI, which actively supports the Trucking Wellness project.

Besides the loss of morale amongst fellow employees, accidents affect the company in other ways. The largest cost is that of the vehicle and the load it carries.

"One truck can cost over R1-million to replace, and often the value of its contents is incalculable," says D'Almeida. "The commercial value of the load can be worth many millions, and there is the additional consequential loss that non-delivery can also cause."

Con Roux, commercial manager for the N3 Toll Concession – a company which is also involved with Trucking Wellness – has seen an interesting trend. "Many insurance companies are coming on board because it is in their financial interests to make sure that truck drivers are healthy.

"One trucking accident can cost millions, and ultimately someone has to pay up. In most cases it's the insurers. Ultimately, it really is in everyone's interests to make sure that this project succeeds."

Roux emphasises the social responsibility element expected of trucking companies with regard to the quality of life of their drivers, as well as other road users who are negatively affected by accidents.

"There is definitely a moral high ground to be taken here," he says. "The consequences of the ill-health of drivers are a major national problem for the industry. By getting involved in Trucking Wellness, a transport operator is strides ahead of its competitors in terms of social responsibility.

"Brand awareness is vitally important in this industry," adds Roux, "and companies are starting to realise the value of being recognised as organisations that care enough about employees to make wellness a priority."

Magretia Brown, labour relations manager for the Road Freight Association, says: "Trucking Wellness results in healthy employees, a prolonged employment relationship and increased productivity, which in turn has a positive effect on the overall performance of the business, and the South African economy on the one hand. On the other hand, it also provides for a healthy individual, with an enhanced personal and family life.

"Driver wellbeing is obviously a primary focus point in this industry, because they play such an important primary role. However, many other employees are also relied on in this industry, and as such the programmes are managed in such a way that they can reach and serve any employee within the industry."

Trucking Wellness provides the ideal solution to a growing issue at no cost to companies themselves. The clinic services are free to drivers – and anyone who might need them – so companies can address the well-being of their drivers free from financial repercussions.



All Trucking wellness clinics are housed in adapted containers with electricity and air conditioning