

# Bison credits simulator training with stellar safety record

By Jan Westell

**WINNIPEG, Man.** – The aircraft industry has long used simulators to develop pilot's aircraft handling ability and safety skills. It's now a technology adopted by some fleets in the trucking industry, including Bison Transport, which credits simulator-based training for its third consecutive Truckload Carriers Association (TCA) national fleet safety award.

"Each year, since we've introduced this, we've certainly managed to create improvements in our accident per-million-mile ratio," says Rob Penner, vice-president of operations for Bison Transport. "And our safety program stacks up well with our competitors, according to TCA."

Simulator scenarios enable drivers to test their skills in a dynamic environment with immediate instructor feedback. The simulation also provides the benefit of practicing safety, regardless of outcome. The scenarios are designed in-house at Bison to address specific training needs based on statistics, fleet experience, and the level of individual risk, which is identified by a driver safety performance report. Training is tailored and can even be prioritized based upon each driver's own personal driver safety score.

"This simulation allows us to give the driver very specific training, and measure them against their own progress, as well as measure the driver against other drivers," says Penner. "We can replay the simulation exactly how they've driven it. It's almost like a video recording: you can



show them. If you think they're following to close, or they're not looking far enough down the road – you can play the simulation back to them, and freeze it or speed it up, or slow it down; wherever you want. The driver does get a very good sense of how well they did."

According to Penner, there is one driving error that stands out, more than any other training issue.

"Perception of following distance is probably the single biggest mistake that most truck drivers make," he says. "We have a simulation what we call the 'seven-second rule.' That's the prescribed safe-following distance for any truck at posted highway speeds. You'll get drivers to drive according to what they think is good, and what they think is safe. Then when you measure, and show them how close they are, and you explain the reaction time and the stopping distance that is required, it's a pretty good indicator."

Bison's training program and safety results are impressive. The transport company had a 17% improvement in backing-related preventable accidents (from 2006

to 2007); an 8.5% improvement in maneuvering-related preventable accidents (from 2006 to 2007); and a 7% improvement in rear-end ahead related preventable accidents (from 2006 to 2007). In addition to the 50% reduction in preventable accidents in 2006, Bison's cost of preventable accidents has decreased a further 9% through 2007.

Since 2003, Bison Transport has used MPRI simulators, a training, simulation and government services company. Today Bison employs four MPRI simulators to provide a continuous, proactive training environment: one "Mark III" model, two "TranSim IV's" and one mobile "TranSim II" unit. □

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2961 West California Avenue  
Salt Lake City, UT 84104

Main: 801.983.9900  
Toll-Free: 888.259.4746  
Fax: 801.983.9901  
[www.mpri.com/driver](http://www.mpri.com/driver)