



Putting drivers' health first

With more than 80% of the country's goods being transported via road, South Africa's trucking industry currently forms the backbone of our economy. Simon Foulds sits down with Tersia Ströh, COO at the National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight and Logistics Industry (NBCRFLI) to find out how critical driver wellness is within the industry.

THE MORE GOODS that are moved, the more our economy thrives. The opposite is also true – when goods are not transported, our economy suffers. Long-distance truck drivers lead a hard life, with prolonged periods of absence from home. Drivers lead a sedentary lifestyle, travelling for hours on end, and often exposed to high-risk behaviour and poor nutritional options.

The nomadic lifestyle of a truck driver also means that it is very difficult for them to access conventional medical services in order to take care of their health. With the above in mind, it is important to ensure that the health and well-being of truck drivers is a priority for us as an industry.

Healthy driver

Says Ströh, "Driving a truck is a highly demanding job with long hours and tight deadlines. It is also a highly responsible job as often cargo worth large sums of money is transported. Quick reflex action is also essential as anything can happen on the road and drivers need to be able to protect both themselves and other drivers on the road. Lastly, if drivers are not well and cannot transport goods around the country, our economy suffers."

Improvement

"In order to ensure the well-being of our truck drivers, as well as South Africa's economy, the National Bargaining Council for the Road Freight Industry launched Trucking Wellness in 1999.

"Trucking Wellness (previously known as Trucking Against Aids) was launched to create awareness around HIV/Aids and sexually transmitted infections among long-distance truck drivers, commercial sex workers and those at risk such as driver spouses and partners. Over the years, the programme has evolved into providing a holistic approach to health and wellness, encompassing a wide range of free primary health-care services.

Education and training

"The highly trained Trucking Wellness nurses and counsellors provide

education and training to drivers regarding HIV/Aids and sexually transmitted infections. Where necessary, they also provide counselling and emotional support.

"Education and training is an effective tool to influence the health and wellness attitudes and behaviour of truck drivers. It equips drivers with the necessary information for them to make responsible decisions. The training is available to drivers whenever they visit a Trucking Wellness Clinic, a mobile clinic and at the Wellness Days.

"It is important for transport operators to consider their employees' health at all times and to communicate with their employees about the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle, not only for themselves and their families, but for the economy too. A large part of this includes pointing their drivers to the tools available to them – the Wellness Centres and the Wellness Fund Health Plan.

Own wellness programmes

"Truck operators can also look into introducing their own Wellness Programmes and Wellness Days within their organisations, encouraging their drivers to maintain healthy lifestyles. Should an operator wish the council to be present at their Wellness Day to inform employees about the various wellness services available to them, they should please contact us so that we can send our mobile office to the Wellness Day.

"By building a health-conscious trucking industry, we help transport companies to operate at their optimum while

also contributing to the overall safety on South African roads." **3S**



**Tersia Ströh, COO
at NBCRFLI**



The NBCRFLI

The NBCRFLI strives to combat the spread of HIV/Aids effectively:

- by encouraging those who test HIV-negative to remain negative
- by keeping those who test HIV-positive healthy and productive for as long as possible
- by positively influencing attitudes to break down stigma surrounding the disease.