

AWARD WINNER'S PROFILE: DERMOT COUGHLAN, KELLY GROUP

Kelly's hero: how Coughlan won a top industry award

The drivers' handbook plays an integral role in the Kelly Group's management of its drivers. Adele Burton talks to transport manager Dermot Coughlan, one of the *Fleet News* fleet managers of the year

DERMOT Coughlan's office is situated above the busy depot and mechanical workshops of cabling and road maintenance group Kelly.

High visibility vests and chart planners give some indication of the nature of the business but offer little evidence to the tightly run fleet department.

Responsible for a 40-strong team, Coughlan has been the transport manager at the Kelly Group for three years with 14 years service in total at group.

The brainchild behind several new initiatives including a revolutionary voucher scheme for fuel use, his ideas helped him secure Fleet Manager of the Year: 401-plus vehicles sponsored by BT Fleet at this year's *Fleet News* Awards.

Coughlan looks after more than 1,000 vehicles up to 3.5-tonne operating from 40 depots around the UK.

His constant attention to detail means he is in contact with each of the depot managers on a weekly basis and spends time in between poring through reports sent by each manager on individual vehicles.

Support from the board helps Coughlan carry out some of the finance-related tasks that many fleets struggle with, such as introducing new systems and driver training. It means he can forge ahead with initiatives which will

save the company money in the long run.

The fuel voucher system is a prime example. Coughlan has shunned the traditional fuel card schemes adopted by many fleets in favour of a voucher system which means drivers have to pre-agree fuel amounts before they purchase.

He explained: 'The fuel voucher system is the initiative which has had the most impact and has given us more control. We agreed a deal with Esso which means we look at the closest stations to each depot and place just one fuel card at the station with three authorised signatures on it.'

'Drivers have to request pre-set vouchers from their manager when they need fuel. These are given to the attendant at the fuel station who swipes the card already there.'

'This means we can dictate how much fuel drivers use and it also limits the amount they can buy. We tried the fuel card system but it didn't work because drivers often swap vehicles, we have a high staff turnover and employees have left the company taking their card with them.'

The group has its own in-house claims management team and mechanics which both save costs over using external suppliers.

Coughlan said: 'We do most of our claims in-house with the internal claims management team which has made

huge savings. We look after 95% of our own claims and this brings us control as we are able to notice trends and it leaves no room for ambiguity.'

'We do all servicing in-house which also saves money and time. It gives the same standard of service as dealers as we have six in-house mechanics and a body shop while at the same time keeping the fleet well maintained.'

Coughlan leaves little room for error on the fleet and ensures that drivers are fully aware of their responsibilities both to the company and out on the road.

This begins at an early stage in the employment process and all new starters go through a training school.

'This involves one day of going through the driver handbook step by step. Every new driver is also assessed within the first two weeks of employment by one of our 15 on-site assessors.'

'We manage to keep on budget because of our procedures. We have thousands of drivers and every site has a manager which checks the procedures are working in line with the guidelines in the driver handbook,' Coughlan said.

However, one area which is currently causing a headache for Coughlan is parking fines.

He explained: 'At the moment parking tickets are a massive problem. Drivers have to carry tools and run cables down the road so they have to park next to a job.'

'At the moment we are trying to train drivers on ways to avoid fines. We are showing them where the bus lanes and cameras are. It currently costs us about £18,000 per month on fixed penalties, which includes congestion charging, parking, bus lanes and stopping on red routes.'

If drivers follow the procedures in the driver handbook the Kelly Group pays the fine but if the driver parks in a place which could have avoided a ticket the driver pays the fine.

Coughlan is hoping to reduce the number of fines by continuing to raise awareness of drivers.



Dermot Coughlan receives his award from Janet Entwistle, managing director, BT Fleet, which sponsored the award

WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

'WORKING in a pressure cooker environment keeping 1,200-plus vans on the road every day has produced a string of great initiatives from Coughlan, who has put his industry qualification to good use. An innovative voucher system for controlling fuel spend has kept costs down and vehicle tracking has meant more efficient use of the fleet

and improved safety by tackling issues such as speeding. A slick recruitment and accident reporting policy puts driver safety first. Licence checks and assessment are all carried out before driving duties can begin. If there is a crash, an in-house solution for tackling claims costs keeps budgets safe, while plans for the future are numerous.'

CAREER PROFILE

■ 1990 - 1991: Fleet administration clerk, Mulrine & Son
■ 1991 - present: Fleet administrator, deputy manager, transport manager, Kelly Group



www.corporateliability.co.uk

It pays to know the facts.