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San Gabriel Valley Division 9 Transportation Assistant Manager Phil Moores spells out "40" in balloon display representing the number of days the division had gone without a Worker's Comp claim. The golden 40th day passed at Division 9 without a Worker's Comp claim. As of Aug. 6, the division had reached 47 days without a claim. Photo by Jimmy Stroup



Division 9 Reaches 47-Day Mark with No Worker's Comp Claims

By JIMMY STROUP

(Aug. 9, 2007) After only a few months of work on a problem that's been plaguing the large division, San Gabriel Valley Division 9's transportation employees reached 47 days as of Aug. 6 without filing a Worker's Compensation claim.

Other divisions have reached marks above and beyond 45 days without a claim. But the size of Division 9's transportation contingent – almost 500 operators – makes going 45 days a milestone worth acknowledging, said Transportation Manager Doug Middleton.

To attack the Worker's Comp problem, Middleton helped set up a "Tiger Team," composed of people representing various levels of Metro management and union employees, with a goal of reducing the number of claims. He said the claims were an indication of a real problem with operators' health as well as costing the agency money and time.

"We've made it known that we want and need to reduce

injuries,” he said. “We’re working to get people to a point where they’re less susceptible to injury – especially those soft tissue injuries that are harder to identify, like strains and pulls.”

The “Tiger Team” approached the problem on various fronts, including promoting the Moller back supports for operators to use while driving and encouraging participation in the new wellness program that Division 9 and North Los Angeles Division 3 have recently started.

Changes were also made to the way the division deals with claims, in the same way that the Safety’s First program has changed the way the agency approaches safety. Now, Division 9 is trying to identify problems before they become a claim, and follow-up is being done on previous claims to prevent recurrence once the operator returns to work.

As a means of judging their success, the team set a goal: reduce the number of claims by 30 percent by June, 2008.

“It seemed like a tough goal, but we’ve been way ahead of that so far,” Middleton said. “I’m proud of the operators for working hard to stay healthy, free of injury and motivated to reach our common goal. Here’s hoping it continues like this.”