

# Health and Safety Spotlight

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By Moni Kehinde and Jesse Mills

Making every "Top 10 Most Dangerous Jobs in America" list, driving a taxi entails a wide range of immediate and chronic health and safety risks. We put our spotlight on health and safety to involve and empower drivers, and to help improve San Diego's taxi industry as a whole.

In light of a string of homicides, robberies,

and assaults against taxicab drivers, UTWSD has embarked this year on a safety initiative to help publicize the job dangers and to advocate for the installation of security cameras in all taxicabs in the City of San Diego. Taxi drivers have reported incidents where customers try to avoid paying their fares by harassing, intimidating, and assaulting the drivers, sometimes resulting in the driver seeking medical attention. Intoxicated customers sometimes get violent, rude, and abrasive on rides. Security cameras have proven to be a significant deterrent to these crimes, and can improve driver safety.

Taxi drivers often work twelve-hour days

and spend the majority of their workday sitting in their taxis. The working conditions of taxi drivers in the City of San Diego are also particularly challenging because the local ordinance governing the industry prohibits taxi drivers from being more than 12 feet away from their taxis while they are working. As a result, many taxi drivers forego taking meal breaks or restroom breaks in order to avoid being issued tickets from MTS and eventually their health suffers. Other stressors like the high lease prices (\$800-\$900 per week), high cost of gas, over ticketing and officer harassment contribute to the high incidences of high blood pressure and heart attacks among taxi drivers.

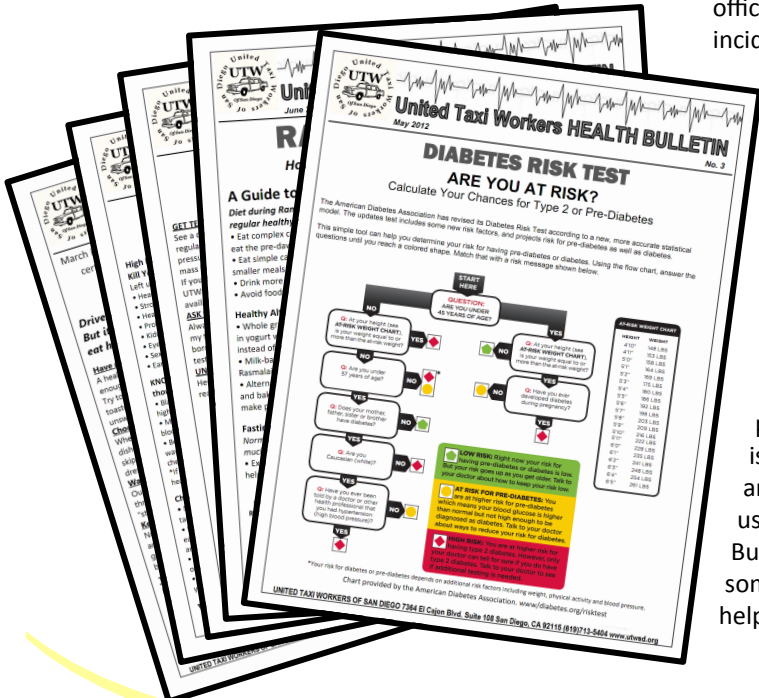
Because drivers do not make a living wage, many do not have health insurance and only seek emergency medical care when it is too late.

Only with the involvement of all of the drivers can we make a difference on these health and safety trends. You can support UTWSD's research projects to help us document the issues and make the case for policy and enforcement changes. You can also use our website to access our "Health Bulletin" and to offer comments sharing some of your own experiences and helpful ideas.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We are gaining more momentum at every level thanks to the help of the UTWSD team—our board of directories, our volunteers, friends, and allies.

We promised to make our industry better and we have been able to achieve a partnership with **San Diego Police Department** in which we discussed various of issues: over-ticketing and MTS violations being issued by SDPD, red zone



**UTWSD's Health Bulletin is a vital resource**

(read online at: <http://utwsd.org/health-driver-initiative/>)



passenger pick ups and drop offs, officers giving warnings instead of ticketing, and more.

Chief Boyd Long was especially concerned about the negative effects tickets have on drivers being able to continue to work, because he believes drivers are an important part of the economy in San Diego.

Finally both UTWSD and the Chief agreed to try to improve the perception between drivers and police, and we thank the SDPD and Harbor police their commitment.

We hope these efforts will improve everyday working conditions and the protection of drivers' rights. There's more to the story, so please visit our website to read: [utwsg.org/2012/08/10/utwsg-meets-sdpd/](http://utwsg.org/2012/08/10/utwsg-meets-sdpd/)

As we indicated in our previous newsletter our relationship with Harbor Police/SDPD is an ongoing process. Therefore, we are asking UTWSD members and non-members to obey traffic laws and respect the process!

If you see something that is not right or are treated unfairly, please ask the officer, their boss, or call us. Please come forward to the UTWSD office Mon-Thurs between the hours of 10 am and 4pm, or visit our website to fill out our driver grievance intake form: [utwsg.org/members-area/drivers-grievance-intake-form/](http://utwsg.org/members-area/drivers-grievance-intake-form/)

*We are not alone. We have rights!*

-Mikaili Hussein, President

# Fighting Illegal TCPs

Many drivers consider TCPs and shuttle busses who illegally pick up customers to be one of their biggest concerns. California law allows town cars, limousines, and shuttles to provide transportation only on a pre-arranged basis.

While much time and resources have been used on cracking down on taxi drivers for things like not wearing

name badges or standing 12 feet away from our cabs, MTS continues to look the other way when it comes to illegal TCP pickups and solicitations at hotels.

What the city should be doing is putting the resources it has generated from over ticketing toward stopping the illegal practices that continue to take money from honest working cabdrivers.

In order to do this we need the type of strong evidence to give to the city, the Sheriff and even the media that will force MTS to take this problem seriously. TCPs and limousines need to be regulated as much if not more than legal taxicab drivers.

You can help by calling our **TCP and Shuttle Bus Hotline at (619)713-5637**. Leave a message with TCP or shuttle bus license numbers that you see picking up illegally or to report hotels that are in violation.

Also your phone is your biggest weapon. Take pictures and video of any illegal activity that we can use as evidence. We cannot afford to lose any more fares to illegal activity. Thank you for helping us fight to STOP illegal pickups for good.



**Towncars violate "pre-arranged" pickup regulations, yet go unpunished.**

# No More Insurance, No Job!

In April a switch of insurance carriers in the taxi industry resulted in more than 100 drivers being denied coverage and losing their ability to work. Align insurance took over and denied coverage to drivers with two or more incidents (accidents and/or tickets) on their driving record. Some drivers had two not-at-fault accidents or cell phone tickets that essentially resulted in their extreme situation. Perhaps the biggest issue was that a major taxi company volunteered unsolicited information about minor infractions of drivers to Align, resulting in the large unfair purge of good drivers.

Mercury insurance, the previous provider, stopped covering the taxi industry

because of increased liability due in part to them being very lenient, even carrying drivers with DUIs and suspended licenses. But more broadly the taxi market in California has been particularly soft (low prices and no underwriting) to the benefit of the taxi owners/operators. The end result is fewer insurance providers are willing to risk their capital insuring a class of business that has been severely underpriced and poorly managed by the insurance brokers and the taxi owners themselves.

The insurance market will likely harden over the next two years. Beyond avoiding accidents and violations, the best thing drivers can do is to

obtain proof of not at fault for any accident they have been involved in and keep it for a minimum of 5 years. Sufficient proof is usually (not always) a police report where the officer makes a determination of fault or a letter or other documentation from the other insurance company acknowledging they are covering the claim on behalf of their driver because that driver was at-fault.

As for tickets, drivers should clear up any Failure To Appear (FTA's), suspensions and/or expired licenses before the renewal of their annual insurance policy, and if they are eligible for driving school to dismiss a moving violation it could be of great benefit.



# MEET THE PRESIDENT

By Matt Freeman

"I was a Joker," Mikaiil says as we discuss his experience playing professional soccer in Somalia. "Do you know what a Joker is?" he asks. I tell him that I don't. "A Joker is someone who can play any position. I could play anywhere, except goalkeeper, I was a horrible goalkeeper," Mikaiil says, laughing with a big grin on his face.

It's not just on the soccer field that Mikaiil played the role of the joker, in his hometown of Mogadishu, during his high school years, Mikaiil attended the Maritime secondary school, opened a private language school for all ages, and brought together his large extended family.

Mikaiil was one of eight children born to a government accountant and a housewife. In about 1992 he, his mother, and his surviving siblings fled from the civil war in Somalia to Kenya. Mikaiil's father stayed behind in Mogadishu. While in Kenya, Mikaiil helped other refugees get over the administrative hurdles to get into Kenya.

After spending about two years in Kenya, Mikaiil and his family came to the United States finally settling in Orange County California. While in Orange County Mikaiil went back to school learning to work on computers, got married, and started his career in computers. In 1999, a friend presented Mikaiil with the opportunity to start his own janitorial business.

Mikaiil jumped at the

opportunity learning the business from ground up doing the janitorial work himself. The business proved successful earning contracts with several cities.

In 2003, Mikaiil's father passed away and he returned to Kenya



**Mikaiil Hussein, Founding President of UTWSD**

to help his mother out. When he left he gave up the janitorial business and when he returned he found himself out of work. He had been away from the computer industry for too long and could not go back to that.

At his wife's urging he started driving a taxi in Orange County. Enjoying his experience driving in Orange County, he felt he had a lot of freedom and could earn decent money.

In 2005, he moved to San Diego and decided he was going to continue driving and went to look for work. Mikaiil was able to find work with the San Diego

Transportation Services Cooperative, Inc. When he went to sign the lease he wanted to look at it but the agent told him to "just sign it. If you don't, I have five other people who will." Needing to work, Mikaiil signed the contract, which he would never see until after he

was terminated.

Mikaiil says the experience of driving a cab and San Diego was much worse than Orange County. Because of the high lease rates, he and other drivers frequently have to work 12 hours a day 7 days a week. Even then they are lucky to make the equivalent of minimum wage and on occasion barely make enough to cover their lease and gas.

Because the leases call the drivers independent contractors they do not receive basic wage and hour protection, workers' compensation coverage, or

unemployment insurance coverage. Feeling the pinch in December 2009, Mikaiil and over 200 other drivers, many of whom are also refugees, stopped driving and protested for lower lease rates. Many of the owners gave in and dropped the lease rates, but only did so verbally. After this, Mikaiil continued to talk to owners about the issues affecting drivers.

It was during this time Mikaiil had his lease terminated because he was speaking up for all drivers. Mikaiil was able to find another owner who would lease him a cab, but when he went into the co-op's office, the agent told Mikaiil he would not sign off on the lease. The agent then called

the owner and told him not to hire Mikaiil because he was a "troublemaker."

The owner decided not to hire him and Mikaiil has been unable to find work as a driver since. That is not to say Mikaiil has been idle in the period since he stopped working as a driver. Today, as president of United Taxi Workers of San Diego, a mutual benefit corporation he helped start, he works to advocate for all drivers in San Diego.

# Upcoming Events

## UTWSD

7364 El Cajon Blvd. Ste 108  
San Diego, CA 92115

## Membership Meetings

5348 University Ave. Ste 110

Aug 20 – 3:00-4:30p.

Sep 24 – 3:00-4:30p.

## Information Session

UTWSD office

Aug 28 – 3:00-5:00p.

Sep 18 – 3:00-5:00p.

Oct 30 – 3:00-5:00p.

Dec 17 – 3:00-5:00p.

## Drivers Seminars

(Industry updates and  
organizing workshops)

UTWSD office

Nov 20, 22, and 27

## Election Outreach

From October through November 6<sup>th</sup>  
UTW will be going door to door,  
registering voters and helping to get  
out the vote. Come join us!

## Airport Meetings

Commuter Terminal 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
3225 North Harbor Drive  
San Diego, CA 92101

- Thursday, July 12, 9am (Special Mtng)
- Thursday, September 6, (Board Mtng)
- Thursday, October 4, 9am
- Thursday, November 1, 9am
- Thursday, December 13, 9am

## Taxicab Advisory Committee

1255 Imperial Ave, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
San Diego, CA 92101

## Meeting Dates for 2012:

- Friday, June 15, 9am
- Wednesday, September 5 (WORM)
- Friday, September 21, 9am
- Friday, December 14, 9am

## Metropolitan Transit System

1255 Imperial Ave, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Suite 1000  
San Diego, CA 92101

## Board Meeting Dates

- Thursday, July 19, 9am
- Thursday, August 16, 9am
- Thursday, September 20, 9am
- Thursday, October 18, 9am (Ord. 11)
- Thursday, November 15, 9am
- Thursday, December 13, 9am



## Mission:

The mission of UTWSD is to unify taxicab workers, to improve working conditions through direct advocacy and empowerment, to increase education and civic participation by taxi drivers and their families, and to improve professional transportation services for San Diego communities and visitors.

## Vision:

We envision a driver-led taxi industry that provides exceptional, efficient, and safe service for residents and visitors, and that meets the comprehensive and diverse needs of taxi drivers and their families. We envision a professional working environment free from humiliation, intimidation, discrimination, and exploitation. We envision UTWSD providing strong and representative leadership in this healthy, productive, and inclusive taxi industry.

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