

## BUSINESS & FINANCE

# Swift Plans to Launch Program For Sleep Apnea Treatment

By Dan Leone  
Staff Reporter

Truckload carrier Swift Transportation, Phoenix, will test its drivers for obstructive sleep apnea in a vendor-sponsored screening and treatment program, Scott Barker, Swift's director of safety and compliance, said Oct. 20.

"This . . . is probably one of the most exciting projects that I've been involved in, because it crosses the bridge between a person's personal wellness and the ability to do the job safely," Barker said.

Swift decided to join an apnea treatment program from an outside provider in late 2007, he said. The carrier issued requests for proposals to five health-care providers and eventually selected Precision Pulmonary Diagnostics, a Houston firm.

Persons with sleep apnea have their breathing during sleep periodically interrupted because of blocked air passages.

The body will reflexively clear blocked airways, but the reflex is severe enough to disrupt sleeping patterns, meaning that persons with sleep apnea feel more fatigued upon waking, Dr. Mark Berger, president of PPD, explained.

Despite having selected an apnea-treatment vendor, Barker said, Swift has no firm timetable to begin screening.

"There's a lot of [information technology] work behind the scenes to make sure that the interface between our systems and PPD's systems works effectively," he said.

PPD's diagnosis involves an

online questionnaire for drivers. Barker said Swift wants to make the form available on its company intranet, which drivers can access on computers at Swift terminals. Drivers also can access the online diagnostic questionnaire from their own computers, he said.

PPD's Berger said the online questionnaire is "a very good way and a very inexpensive way to screen drivers." The goal, he said, is "to identify which drivers appear to be most prone to having sleep apnea."

If a driver's questionnaire reveals a high probability of sleep apnea, the driver must spend a night in a sleep lab for more extensive testing, Berger said.

PPD has partnerships with 15 such sleep labs across the country. The relatively wide distribution of these testing facilities, he said, allows for overnight diagnoses without taking drivers off their routes.

If the overnight testing reveals a case of sleep apnea, PPD provides "continuous positive airway pressure" equipment to the affected driver.

The CPAP equipment essentially is an air pump connected by a hose to a face mask. Drivers wear the face mask while sleeping, and the airflow from the CPAP device prevents the blockage of breathing passages, Berger said.

Besides Swift, PPD also has worked with truckload carrier Schneider National, Green Bay, Wis., to diagnose and treat drivers for sleep apnea cases (9-17-07, p. 6).

Schneider and Swift rank No. 9 and No. 10 respectively on the TRANSPORT TOPICS 100 list of the largest for-hire carriers in the United States and Canada.

