



Care and Responsibility:

Are Drivers Adhering to Equipment and Safety Best Practices?

By Teresa Dias

Introduction

Accidents, injuries, and damage to equipment are a direct result of inadequate attention to safety and maintenance requirements. Organizations incur huge financial losses every year due to entirely preventable failures to observe the standards of care. Due to the nature of the work, members of the public are often affected, both physically and financially. All too often, the expensive and injurious effects of inattention to standards could have been avoided by rigorous, mindful adherence to industry best practices.

The concepts and real-world examples described in this paper will provide you with information you need to minimize loss, damage, and injury while operating expensive equipment. By applying this information, you will help to eliminate problems and unnecessary expenses. This guide can serve as a reference and starting point for working as a team to ensure that we are doing all that we can in the interest of care and safety.

Proper Pre- and Post-trip Inspections: Are the Drivers Taking Care of the Equipment?

The time to find problems with the vehicles is while they are still in your yard. The benefits are plentiful: Less downtime, fewer DOT/Inspection Station stops, fewer violations that would affect your SAFER scores, and more timely delivery to your customers. It is likely that you may find an issue that could cause an accident or indicate misuse. While they are time-consuming, your efforts to perform close, careful inspections will save much more time, money, and even lives in the immediate future.

Your driver has been entrusted with a very expensive piece of equipment, and you should walk the yard and visually inspect the equipment. Most people would not allow strangers to drive their personal automobile, which costs far less than your company's equipment. Drivers should be expected to treat the equipment with the care and respect it deserves, and your inspection will reveal whether or not this is occurring. The following are aspects of a comprehensive visual inspection that should be performed to see if the equipment is being properly maintained:

- **Check for new damage to the cab:** A careful, 360° walking survey of the equipment should be done to check for any damage done since the last inspection. Accountability for damage is a very important first step to preventing future damage.
- **Check the tires:** Future problems can be predicted and prevented by a close tire inspection, especially when identifying foreign objects in or between the tires which can cause a flat or blowout on the road. The nature of the wear can also tell you a great deal about the use or misuse of the equipment; for example, irregular wear on the tires could be caused by an alignment problem, which in turn would cause costly early replacement. Tires should be inspected for:
 - **Tread depth:** Measure tread depth to ensure the minimum for the wheel position. Front wheel tires should have a minimum 4/32" tread depth; rear tires need at least 2/32".
 - **Pressure:** Verify that the inflation pressure is correct for the load.
 - **Sidewall wear or damage:** Inspect for exposed belt or ply material.
 - **Dual tire contact:** Vehicles with dual tire configurations are susceptible to wear if the tires come into contact with one another.
 - **Tire size uniformity:** If tires are not the same size, uneven load distribution causes wear.
 - **Tire type uniformity:** Mixing dual-ply with radial tires on a vehicle can cause a blowout.
 - **Rim cracks and bolt holes:** Wheels can develop cracks and misshapen bolt holes, which require replacement.
 - **Valve stems:** A tire's valve stem can become worn and cracked, causing pressure loss and blowouts.
 - **Lug nuts:** Loose lug nuts can cause wheel damage, as well as allowing the nuts to rust and cause damage¹.
- **Look at the inside the cab:** The state of a driver's cab is often the first thing checked in a roadside inspection, and will tell you a great deal about the care a driver is taking overall². Is the cab kept clean and organized? Loose items on the floor become projectiles in the event of an accident or sudden stop. Force is calculated by multiplying mass times velocity; in an 40 mph accident, a two pound object on a seat or dashboard exerts 80 pounds of force directed at whomever or whatever is in its path. Of course, a clean cab shows concern for safety, respect for the equipment, and reveals how the driver is treating your asset.



New Routes

Many accidents happen on a driver's first trip to a new customer's facility. Prior to sending a driver on a new route, always have someone attempt the route in a car first – preferably one of your best drivers. Driving the route with a car will reveal impediments to entering the facility from one way or another, a common circumstance which could cause issues.

The following is a tragic example of what can occur when such a precaution is not taken: a customer of a driver leasing company sent a driver to make the first pick up at a new account. The driver came off the freeway intending to make three right turns to get to the facility. The first right turn after he got off the freeway had an island which obstructed the turn. The street he was turning from was very busy street, so he couldn't swing out into traffic. He ended up cutting close, drove over the curb, clipped the traffic light fixture and knocked it over. There was a pedestrian at the light who was struck on the head by the fixture; he was not killed, but permanently disabled. This catastrophic accident could have been avoided by taking three left turns and then a right turn into the very large, wide driveway of the customer's facility. All of the left turns had turn lanes and lights.

The accident described above was an avoidable, and could have been prevented by planning and surveying the route. All too often, however, basic safety procedures for new routes are not observed: a simple Web search will reveal that such accidents unfortunately and unnecessarily common. In a large truck accident

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causation study conducted between April 2001 and December 2003, research indicated that 87% of all heavy trucking accidents were caused by errors in the driver's performance, recognition of a critical event, and reaction to a critical event³.

If your customer has their own drivers, ask which route they take back to their own facility. In the above case, all company drivers took the left turn route back to their facility; this information would have been invaluable.

New Drivers

Allow the time for a new driver to talk with your existing drivers about his route. Encourage them to seek out experienced drivers as a valuable resource. Your current drivers can be a wealth of information, and they can share the challenges that they face with the routes, traffic, even the customers. Such insight is invaluable.

Mentors can be found by seeking out those who have been successful in the industry. Superficial traits such as cab decoration or new equipment are not the best indicators of someone who would be a good mentor. A successful driver who clearly takes good care of their equipment, have logged many hours and miles, have a wide variety of experiences, and are dedicated to their profession is the best mentor candidate. Such professionals can be found by listening to the advice and insight they give in the course of normal interaction; people who have many stories of the work are common, but a mentor grounds his insight in reality. When you identify such a person, you can establish a good working relationship that will benefit both of you⁴.

Equipment Specifications

When you acquire new equipment, whether you are buying or leasing it, always remember that price and cost are not the same thing. The price is what you initially pay for the vehicle; the cost is what you will pay throughout the life of the vehicle. These costs include everything from fuel to the living expenses of life on the road, and even the most efficient operator will incur them⁵.

For example, if payload is important, paying more for lighter weight components would make sense. The cost of the lightweight component is a one-time charge, but the ability to carry more product is ongoing. If the equipment is light enough and you have a large fleet, you may actually be able to reduce your overall fleet size by one unit.

Safety features are another added cost that pay for themselves many times over the life of the equipment. For example, headlights that automatically turn on whenever your windshield wipers are engaged are invaluable, for both efficiency and safety reasons. The minimal charge of this option – often under \$20 – is miniscule compared to a \$200 (or more) ticket for not having your headlights on during inclement weather.

Another example is a feature that allows your driver to test the exterior lights with the press of a button: all lights will cycle numerous times so the driver can walk around and check each of the lights, as opposed to getting a ticket for a light not working or, even worse, skipping the check altogether.

While these options add to the price of equipment, the cost in the long will be far less when you consider the safety and functionality benefits. It is recommended that new drivers ask mentors for advice in this respect, as well as reading trade publications and websites for information about new options that could benefit you and your equipment. The following resources are recommended:

- **USTRuck.com**

“New trucks includes safety features”:

<<https://www.ustruck.com/news/new-trucks-includes-safety-features/>>

- **Automotive World website**

“The future of truck safety lies in technology”:

<<http://www.automotiveworld.com/analysis/future-truck-safety-lies-technology/>>

- **Wastedrive.com**

“FleetMind launches new ‘smart truck’ features to enhance safety, efficiency”:

<<http://www.wastedrive.com/news/fleetmind-launches-new-smart-truck-features-to-enhance-safety-efficiency/408773/>>



Surviving Inspections

When your drivers are pulled in for an inspection, there are several things they can do to minimize their chances of receiving a full-blown inspection and risking a violation. According to Andy Blair, who is an ex-law enforcement officer and Department of Transportation specialist, proactive steps a driver can take are as follows:

1. Keep your cab tidy: If all things appear be in order (BASIC scores, no obvious issues such as a light being burned out), you will most likely be directed to continue on your route.

2. Make your documents easy to inspect: Have all papers and cards organized, preferably in a binder. If an inspector sees that your paperwork is in order, the chances of further inspection diminish.

3. Check your attitude: It is totally at the officer’s discretion as to who he or she will inspect. It should go without saying that one should never become defensive or abusive toward an inspector.

4. There is a quota for inspections: While there is no quota for citations, sometimes you may still get a Level 1 inspection despite the initial appearance that everything is in order. Such a circumstance occurs because inspectors’ credentials require that they perform a minimum number of inspections.

5. Calmly endure inspection: “If you are chosen for an inspection, grit your teeth, bite your tongue, and get through it with some grace,” Andy Blair recommends. The inspecting officer has the full discretion to write or not write a citation, as well as the discretion to cite you or the company⁶.

The Three Top Violation/Convictions with a 100% or More Likelihood of an Accident

Accidents are unpredictable events, but the analysis of statistics can illuminate circumstances that increase your risk. Nationwide statistics show that the following violations and convictions have a 100% or greater likelihood of being followed by an accident in the future:

- **Reckless Driving Violation:** A future accident is 325% more likely
- **Improper Turn Violation:** 105% more likely
- **Improper or Erratic Lane Change Conviction:** 100% more likely⁷

Take these violations very seriously. The violations listed above are only the top three; data published by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance indicates almost two dozen cited violations that correlate to an increased risk of an accident⁸. Discuss each and every one of these violations with the driver and coach them on the repercussions for receiving these violations.

Conclusion

As noted above, the difference between price and cost becomes very clear in light of maintenance requirements. It is highly recommended that your vendor is knowledgeable about these and other concerns for your business. A professional, competent equipment provider should take the initiative to learn enough about your business to become a valuable partner who understands the stake he or she has in your long-term success.

AUTHOR:

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