

## **GPS Systems**

## GPS systems - Don't leave home without the 'right' one!

GPS systems have become an integral part of our travel tools – they're relatively inexpensive and can provide a world of information to the traveler that was not previously available. The bad news about these devices is that the same unit appropriate for your Aunt Millie to find her way from Garden City, KS to McCook, NE is NOT the appropriate unit for commercial motor vehicle drivers.

<u>WHY NOT?</u> At the present time, there are several different types of GPS which may or may not be appropriate for the Commercial Motor Vehicle operator. The technology surrounding the creation of the direction set that comes up on the screen is a total mystery to most people but a couple of facts are a given – they rely on satellite positioning to give the unit information (a starting point) to make the calculation for the trip. Most units have settings that allow the user to receive directions over the shortest route or the fastest route. Detail much beyond those two settings with respect to the types of roads and other information is, for the most part, not available with standard automobile GPS units.

**HOW CAN I TELL THE DIFFERENCE?** For the most part, large vehicle enabled devices can be identified just by reading the packaging. Since the trucking market is relatively new for the GPS manufacturers, they are aggressively attempting to reap the trucking dollars and, as a result, they are quick to place wording such as TRUCK ENABLED or LARGE VEHICLE SPECIFIC on their packaging.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE IN THE GPS UNITS FOR TRUCKS? Major brand units have somewhat different settings which allow the operator to 'tell' the unit the size, weight and cargo information on the vehicle that is being driven. This allows the GPS unit to select routes based on the information provided. For example, a truck carrying HAZMAT can find huge differences in WHERE a vehicle is allowed to operate. In addition, many allow easily programmed stops in transit and a few will actually optimize the routing (which only works if the trailer is loaded in the order the route is being driven). Several units also break down mileage by state and help a driver monitor speed limits.

**SO, IS ALL OF THIS PERFORMANCE GUARANTEED?** In a word – NO! Experienced GPS users will be the first to acknowledge that while GPS technology is great, constantly evolving and ever-changing, it is a LONG way from perfect! NO known manufacturer offers any type of warranty for the information provided. So, even though the unit will be right in a very high percentage of cases with respect to the 'best' route along with size and weight restrictions – it's NOT a perfect world AND it does not remove the common sense responsibilities of a driver as to the safe operation of the commercial motor vehicle.

HOW DO I DETERMINE WHICH UNIT IS BEST FOR ME? The size of the unit is a primary consideration – it needs to be big enough to see but not located in the line of vision. The loudness of the speaker is important because it allows the driver to HEAR the directions rather than looking at them on the display. Certainly, most of us will have confidence in units manufactured by a leader in the industry, and there are 3 – 4 of those that also produce truck enabled GPS. The number of 'whistles and bells' available on these units are amazing; therefore, some discretion should be used in the choice of a unit since every option adds to the price. One useful feature (particularly in large cities) is a Real Time Traffic Receiver. This add-on accessory (which is a different power cord) will let you know of traffic tie-ups and problems ahead.

**DISTRACTED DRIVING?** Any time a driver is in a strange area and looking for an address, distraction can be an unwelcome by-product! Will a GPS unit eliminate the distraction of finding an address? Possibly, or it could reduce the distraction. BUT, caution is always advised when using an in-cab electronic device of any type. And the use of these devices in NO WAY would be considered as an excuse to not pay attention to your surroundings, the height of overpasses and the highway that you're driving on. These devices can be an AID to assist a driver, but they do NOT remove the ultimate responsibility for attentive and safe driving from the driver!