

# TRUCK TALK

A Publication of  
Continental Western Group®



## Technology and the Commercial Motor Vehicle

There is an old statement that has been around the transportation industry for many years – it goes like this: regardless of what I think, the officer is the one with the badge and the gun! Certainly that is a statement of WHO has the final say in any vehicle enforcement situation without regard to our opinion.

In today's CSA world, that statement would be better amended to: he's the one with the badge and the computer. In today's enforcement world, the laptop computer with links to the internet is one of the most powerful tools available to commercial vehicle enforcement officers. CDL and motor carrier information is available to the officer in the field quickly to allow him/her to focus on known problem areas for the company or the individual.

The past couple of years have seen an increase in the use of technology to assist the enforcement community with the task of commercial motor vehicle enforcement.

New to the vehicle inspection scene is the VIS Performance Based Brake Tester, a technological marvel which is essentially a brake dynamometer. This allows an enforcement officer to measure and document the performance of a braking system rather than just acknowledging that it's there and that it doesn't leak or have chafing hoses. This portable system tests the entire braking system in addition to weighing each axle and measuring rolling resistance. This allows the inspector to identify any weak or substandard components and then provides a Pass or Fail analysis of the test. To learn more about these systems, go to [www.vischeck.net](http://www.vischeck.net) on the internet.

Let's take a look at the wonders of Pre Pass. Pre Pass is available to carriers at a fee and allows the information contained in the SAFERSYS snapshot (and at some point in the near future it may incorporate CSA data) to be instantly available to enforcement authorities at permanent facilities (state scales and permanent inspection stations) in 30 States. This allows the enforcement staff at these facilities to concentrate their attention on carriers that have a history of non-compliance.

Another area that is becoming common at inspection sites is the use of heat sensors (either hand held or built into the scale). These are frequently employed to identify tires that are low on air pressure. This allows a commercial vehicle inspector to utilize an air pressure gauge on tires that are hotter (possibly low on air), and therefore not in compliance with 393.75(h)(1). This states in part that "No motor vehicle shall be operated on a tire which has a cold inflation pressure less than that specified for the load being carried" and (2) which provides a formula for calculating cold inflation pressures of tires in use. Stationary infrared cameras can also detect over heated brakes, bearings and tires which should lead to a full level 3 CVSA inspection to determine causes and effect repairs before the vehicle is allowed to proceed.

For a number of years, laser beams have been used to measure vehicle height, information which was previously difficult to obtain. This information can point to the need for an over-height permit and/or a violation of statute – either way a benefit to the State and in some cases the motor carrier who might not be aware of the height.

In accident investigations where improper vehicle operation is suspected, enforcement authorities or opposing attorneys have been known to subpoena the engine ECM (electronic control module) which stores data on the vehicle's performance, such as engine over-runs, panic stops, idle time, etc. This data can be reconstructed and used as evidence – either in a civil trial or against the carrier as a part of a FMCSA intervention. The black box is here and has been for a number of years – it's just being utilized with more regularity these days.

The bottom line to all of this is that many states will go to just about any level to insure compliance with State and Federal regulations. If you were to summarize all of this information, the conclusion would be that it's just cheaper, safer and better business to run compliant.

**[Spain@cwains.com](mailto:Spain@cwains.com) • [jschenker@cwains.com](mailto:jschenker@cwains.com) • [ckovachevich@cwains.com](mailto:ckovachevich@cwains.com)**

Continental Western Group, LLC and affiliated companies assume no liability in connection with your use or non-use of the information provided in this document and do not guarantee that the information contained herein includes all possible risks or unusual circumstances that may occur in or to your business or that the advice or recommendations contained herein comply with all federal, state or local laws or regulations. Any advice or recommendations made in this document are intended to assist you in reducing risk of loss, thereby reducing the possibility that our companies will need to make a payment under an insurance policy. These recommendations are not intended to substitute for any obligation that you or anyone else may have to survey, repair, or modify any property, equipment or operations or to conduct safety programs. It is your legal responsibility to maintain safe premises, equipment and operations. This document provides general information only, is not legal advice, and is not a statement of contract. Any statement regarding insurance coverage made herein is subject to all provisions and exclusions of the entire insurance policy.

Copyright © 2011 Continental Western Group, LLC. All rights reserved.