

TRUCK TALK

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Road Check 2011

The annual 'blitz' has become a 'right of passage into summer' for most motor carriers and certainly is a memorable 3 day period for enforcement personnel as they find their normal routines redirected toward vehicle inspections. Many truck drivers dread this time if for no other reason than 'another driver told me it was terrible'! For those who choose a path other than 100% compliance, there are more than likely some good reasons for that feeling.

Let's a look at exactly what was uncovered during Roadcheck 2011 and if those violations were in any way controllable by the drivers who received them!

In the Driver category, the top 4 violations discovered were:

Hours of Service	52.5 %
False Logs	14.9 %
Suspended License	5.3 %
Expired License	1.5 %

Remember, this is of the 4.2% of drivers that did NOT pass. Compared to 2010, the 2011 overall compliance rate was up .2% to 95.8%! Certainly this could be attributed to increased awareness on the part of drivers that THEIR on highway performance is just as important TO THEM as the company's performance is to the motor carrier. When you think about the meaning of those statistics, it certainly shows that the industry as a whole has improved consistently over the last several years.

For 2011, the top 4 Out of Service Equipment violations were:

Brake Adjustment	23.0 %
Brake System	29.2 %
Lights	12.3 %
Tires & wheels	10.9 %

There is good news and bad news. The good news is that the overall compliance rate for vehicles was up .7%. This is significant when consideration is given to the recovering economy and the fact that many highway units are being retained in service longer than in previous years. Certainly the higher percentage of vehicles passing is a good sign that we are headed in the right direction.

The bad news is that detractors of the industry can truthfully state to anyone that will listen that 'almost 20% of the commercial motor vehicles on the highway today have a major defect as uncovered by Road Check 2011 and over 50% of those have a dangerous brake problem'.... That little statement didn't take a lot of imagination to create and given some time to think in that direction most of us can come up with similar. The point is that there will be people using these types of numbers against our industry!



What can we do as a group to improve these numbers? Logic would dictate that there were very few carriers equipped with Electronic On Board Data Recorders who were cited for Hours of Service (HOS) violations. It is the opinion of many people that even though these are not required for most motor carriers presently, the carriers who are using them are having fewer problems with HOS violations than those who are not! If you have questions about these, take a few minutes and talk to a carrier that is using them (many proudly placard their trucks with Electronic Logs stickers on the driver's door area) and see how satisfied they are with this system. In the case of suspended and expired licenses, monitoring the driver's CDL on a periodic basis will allow a carrier to catch these violations before an inspector discovers it by the side of the road and declares the driver (and thus the truck and load) out of service.

Improving roadside vehicle check results can be as simple as drivers actually performing their Daily Vehicle Inspection and recording and reporting defects so that they can be repaired. When you note the violations that are at the top of the violations list, Brake Adjustment is the leader and this is something that can be noted by a driver the minute he does his vehicle inspection. Brake System most likely involves the 'chafing lines' and other sorts of miscellaneous violations that have been a problem forever. Even something as simple as a glad hand seal leaking can result in an out of service violation and it's very easily detectable by a driver doing his vehicle inspection. Tires and wheels??? Tires don't wear out 100 miles from the terminal and wheels don't 'loosen' or crack suddenly – these violations are readily detectable IF someone is looking. The point is that the top 5 violations this year are all detectable by drivers during their Daily Vehicle Inspection – IF they do it, and do it right.

So, is the industry headed in the right direction? Without question, YES it is! CSA (Compliance, Safety, Accountability) has raised the bar as FMCSA officials had hoped – in a sense all units are in a competition as they roll down the highway – to be the safest and to successfully pass a vehicle inspection given by the side of the road! Those that do successfully pass an inspection help to raise the percentile of the company that they drive for; those that don't pass lower the percentile of their company they work for and carry the black mark of an out of service inspection for 3 years on the driver's personal record.

What it boils down to is you want to control those things you can, because there is a lot out there that you can't.

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