

TRUCK TALK

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Operation Air Brake

Out of adjustment brakes and brake system defects constitute the major defect areas resulting in commercial vehicles being placed out of service. Poorly adjusted or defective air brakes reduce the braking capacity for large commercial vehicles and further inhibit their stopping distance. This increases the risk to other users of the road and the driver of the commercial vehicle.

Over the past few years there has not been a significant change in the rate of vehicles being placed out of service for poor air brake adjustment or other brake related defects. Traditional enforcement methods are having a reasonable impact in helping to remove dangerous vehicles from the road. However, much more needs to be done.

In order to reduce the out of service rate for brake defects, a more comprehensive campaign has been developed. Operation Air Brake is a safety campaign dedicated to improving commercial vehicle brake safety throughout North America. The objective of Operation Air Brake is to reduce the number of highway crashes caused by faulty braking systems on commercial vehicles by conducting roadside inspections and educating drivers, mechanics, and others on the importance of brake inspection, maintenance and operation.

Some of the activities of Operation Air brake include:

- CVSA-certified inspectors conduct roadside inspections of commercial vehicles and their drivers with an emphasis on braking systems.

- CVSA-certified inspectors are encouraged to meet with drivers at truck stops and other locations where drivers and mechanics congregate. The inspectors would conduct inspections of commercial vehicles in an effort to instruct and educate drivers on the inspection procedure and the operation of the braking systems. This is an educational, not an enforcement event.
- Educational brochures are available both at the roadside and at locations where inspectors would meet with drivers and mechanics.

Operation Air Brake conducted an unannounced brake check day on May 7, 2008, in 45 states and Canadian provinces, which resulted in the following:

- 11,908 vehicles inspected
- 93,751 brakes inspected
- 9.9% of vehicles placed out of service for brake adjustment defects
- 8.3% of vehicles placed out of service for brake component defects
- 15.8% of vehicles placed out of service for brake related defects

It is interesting to note that the out of service rate for manually adjusted brakes is more than double the rate for commercial vehicles equipped with self-adjusting brake adjusters. However, a significant problem is the practice of manually adjusting self-adjusting brake adjusters. If you have a brake that is over-stroking and it has an automatic brake adjuster, you more than likely have a problem with the brake or the adjuster. If you just readjust it, you are not fixing the underlying problem. Manually adjusted automatic slack adjusters will likely go out of adjustment soon after their adjustment, and the underlying issue with the braking system will still exist.