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Preventive maintenance: The driver's role

A professional driver's involvement is key when it comes to a successful preventive maintenance program. Drivers are often the first to notice a problem or issue, and can have it repaired before it becomes one that can cause a breakdown or accident.

Driver responsibility

As a driver, you are ultimately responsible for the safe operating condition of your vehicle. You can do the following to help keep your vehicle's components in good working order:

- Be proficient in detecting maintenance and repair needs, and refer them to the correct place for handling;
- Be expert at doing good pre-trip and post-trip inspections, making sure all pertinent components are checked with each inspection;
- Be certain that an annual vehicle inspection has been conducted on the vehicle; and
- Stop to check out any potential problems that may be developing with the vehicle.

You shouldn't continue with your trip until you are satisfied that everything is in good operating condition, and it's safe to do so. Federal and state regulations state that a driver may not drive a vehicle unless satisfied that it is in safe operating condition.



Observation and communication

Observation and communication are an important part of a preventive maintenance program. The driver needs to put his/her senses to work.

Listen for unusual or abnormal equipment sounds such as rattles, squeaks, and hisses.

Smell for unusual odors such as burning rubber or hot oil.

Feel for changes in the vehicle's response, including steering, braking, and shifting.

Observe all vehicle components carefully during routine inspections. Look for defects.

Poor maintenance pitfalls

It is important to report vehicle defects and deficiencies to the motor carrier as soon as they are discovered. Not reporting a problem when it first occurs can have serious consequences for both a driver and his/her motor

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carrier, including potentially a vehicle breakdown or an accident.

Breakdown costs include more than the parts and labor to get the vehicle up and running once again. Every minute a truck is in the shop or placed out of service, it is not being used to bring in revenue to a carrier. An incapacitated vehicle may incur additional expense, such as:

- Cost of towing;
- Driver wages, meals, and lodgings when unable to drive;
- Cost of renting another vehicle;
- Late delivery charges;
- Lost customers; and/or
- Cargo transfer fee.

These costs have a bearing on a motor carrier's bottom line, its profitability. This in turn can play a role in a driver's future compensation and benefits with the company.

If a defective part causes an accident, the costs incurred can include insurance deductibles, higher insurance rates, potential litigation, and a tarnished safety record for the carrier. For a driver, it could mean potential citations and fines as well as personal injury.

The regulatory requirements

Part 396 of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs) addresses vehicle inspection and maintenance. The regulations address systematic maintenance, daily inspections, and annual/periodic inspections.

Systematic maintenance. Section 396.3 of the FMCSRs states that every motor carrier must systematically inspect, repair, and maintain all vehicles in its control or make provisions for this regular, scheduled program of maintenance.



The term systematic means a regular or scheduled program to keep vehicles in safe operating condition. In other words, a motor carrier must have a preventive maintenance program. It is up to the motor carrier to determine the time-frame for conducting systematic vehicle inspections, as long as they are reasonable and systematic. They may be based on mileage, time, or engine hours.

Pre-trip inspection. Section 396.13 of the FMCSRs states that before driving a motor vehicle a driver must:

- Be satisfied that the vehicle is in safe operating condition;
- Review the last vehicle inspection report (see post-trip inspection); and
- Sign the report, only if defects or deficiencies were noted by the driver who prepared the report, to acknowledge that the report has been reviewed and that there is certification that the repairs have been performed.

On-the-road inspection (enroute). Section 392.9 of the FMCSRs requires that a driver follow certain inspection rules while on the road.

The vehicle's cargo and load-securing devices must be checked within the first 50 miles of a trip. Any necessary adjustments must be made at this time.

After the first 50 miles of the trip, the vehicle's cargo and load-securing devices must be reexamined:

- When there is a change of duty status; or
- After the vehicle has been driven for 3 hours; or
- After the vehicle has been driven 150 miles — whichever occurs first.

These on-the-road inspection rules do not apply if the vehicle is sealed and the driver has been ordered not to open the vehicle to inspect its cargo. Also, the rules do not apply if the vehicle has been loaded in a way that makes inspection of the cargo difficult or impossible.

Post-trip inspection. A post-trip inspection is conducted at the end of a driver's day of work on the vehicle operated. This inspection includes filling out a driver vehicle inspection report (DVIR) if defects or deficiencies are discovered. This report helps a motor carrier make necessary repairs before the vehicle returns to the road.

Roadside inspections

A roadside inspection is an examination of a driver and his/her commercial motor vehicle by law enforcement to ensure compliance with the FMCSRs as well as the Hazardous Materials Regulations (HMRs). The goal is to

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ensure that safe drivers and vehicles are on the road.

Most roadside inspections occur at weigh stations or scales along the highway. They are conducted by trained law enforcement officers who follow specific guidelines as outlined by the North American Uniform Out-of-Service Criteria, developed by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA).

The Out-of-Service Criteria identifies critical vehicle inspection items and provides enforcement with criteria for placing a vehicle out of service. If placed out of service, the vehicle cannot be operated again until all defects and deficiencies have been repaired. In addition,



a motor carrier must not allow, permit, or require a driver to violate an out-of-service order.

The consequences are severe for violating an out-of-service order. Both the driver and motor carrier can be fined, and the driver can be disqualified from operating commercial motor vehicles. Also, keep in mind that a great deal of data for the Compliance, Safety Accountability (CSA)

program is collected at roadside. Vehicle maintenance violations are frequently cited during roadside inspections and can have a negative impact on a motor carrier's CSA scores.

Safety focus: Are animal strikes considered crashes?

Motor carriers often have odd scenarios that cause damage to their vehicles. Many are left wondering if these incidents fit within the definition of accident under the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulation.

Those within the scope must appear on an accident register and be used in the calculation of the carrier's Compliance, Safety, Accountability Crash Indicator Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Category.

Let's look at common scenarios. Suppose your truck's windshield is struck by a large bird and is damaged severely. Or suppose a deer decides to jump into the side of your truck damaging the mirrors. Must these events be recorded in accordance with Section 390.15?

If the vehicle had damage and the officer required towing or marked the police accident report as being a tow-away accident, then the crash will need to be on the company's DOT accident register. There is no exception for animal strikes.



Official Interpretative Guidance to Section 390.5 reads:

Question 13: To what extent would the wind shield and/or mirrors of a vehicle have to be damaged in order for it to be considered "disabling damage" as used in the definition of an accident in §390.5?

Guidance: The decision as to whether damage to a windshield and/or mirrors is disabling is left to the discretion of the investigating officer.

Be sure to build a good accident file, including the police report and any investigative work you did to verify it was an animal strike. If you are audited, you can ask that non-preventable accidents, such as animal strikes, be removed from the calculation of your accident rate in Factor 6 of the audit. The police report and your investigation will be the proof you will need to convince the investigator that the accident should not be used in the calculation.



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From brains to brawn, exercise enhances your life

"While we are considering when we ought to begin, it is often too late to act."

Quintillian
(AD 35 – AD 96)

Looking for a reason to get off the couch and start moving? You'll benefit from being active, no matter your age, size, or shape. Here are some ways exercise gives your life a boost:

Weight control: When you're active, you burn more calories, and this helps you reach and stay at a healthy weight.

A great feeling: Your brain releases chemicals during exercise that can lift your mood and make you more relaxed. It can also help prevent depression. When you are hiking through the woods or biking with friends, you may be enjoying yourself so much that you don't realize you're exercising.

Disease prevention: By exercising regularly, you reduce your risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and some cancers. In addition, you can lower your blood pressure and improve cholesterol levels.

A brain boost: A recent study found a link between higher levels of physical activity and brain health in older adults. The study, published in the Journal of Gerontology, found that older adults who had a more active lifestyle had more gray matter in the brain (a measure of brain health) in the areas controlling muscle

movement, thinking, feeling, memory, and speech. Activity Included everyday chores, such as house cleaning, gardening, or walking the dog, as well as structured exercise.

Less stiffness: Activity and exercise can help decrease pain from arthritis, which affects the joints and the tissues surrounding them. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that exercise can also improve your ability to do everyday tasks. Walking, biking, swimming, and water activities are good ways to ease the pain.

More strength: Regular exercise protects bones, joints, and muscles, and this is especially important as a person gets older. Bone density lessens with age, but this loss can be slowed by moderate aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening activities.



Exercise provides more than just physical benefits.

By the numbers

Federal guidelines recommend that adults perform at least **150 minutes** per week of moderate aerobic activity or **75 minutes** a week of vigorous activity. Adults should also perform muscle-strengthening activities involving all muscle groups on **two or more** days of the week.

- **51.7** percent of adults meet aerobic activity guidelines.
- **21.7** of adults meet both aerobic and muscle-strengthening activity guidelines.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics

