

DOT COMMERCIAL MOTOR VEHICLE **INSPECTIONS**

COURSE OUTLINE

- **An estimated 15.5 million trucks operate on the roads in this country.**
- **To help keep the roads safe for everyone who uses them, the Department of Transportation requires motor carriers to implement a program of regular inspection and maintenance for the trucks that they operate... whether they have a large fleet, or just a single truck.**
 - Commercial drivers play an important part in these programs.
- **The inspections that drivers perform help to ensure that any problems with a vehicle are identified and repaired before they hit the road.**
- **In transportation, the most hazardous problems are often the ones that "sneak up" on you, because they're more likely to cause accidents and injuries when they catch you by surprise.**
 - To help prevent this, the Department of Transportation (DOT) has established regulations that require motor carriers to implement inspection and maintenance programs for the vehicles that they operate.
- **Enforced by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), these rules are designed to ensure not only that trucks and trailers are kept in good condition, but also that any mechanical or load-related problems are identified and repaired as soon as possible... before they become serious hazards.**
- **As part of this program, a motor carrier's vehicles are subject to five different types of inspections.**
 - An FMCSA "periodic" inspection at least once a year.
 - A "pre-trip" inspection each time they go on the road.
 - "En-route" inspections that a driver makes during a trip.
 - "Roadside" inspections that are conducted by DOT or law-enforcement personnel.
 - A "post-trip" inspection at the end of each trip.

- **The people who perform the mandated periodic inspections must be certified by the FMCSA and prepare a report for each inspection, which they submit to the motor carrier.**
 - After any necessary maintenance or repairs have been performed on the vehicle, the motor carrier keeps the report on file.
- **Periodic inspections address the condition of a truck over the long term, but the FMCSA regulations address a vehicle's day-to-day condition as well.**
 - This is where drivers play a crucial role.
- **CDL-licensed drivers are responsible for three of the five types of inspections that their trucks undergo.**
 - This is why you have to demonstrate the ability to inspect a vehicle and its cargo, and determine that it is safe to operate, in order to get a commercial driver's license.
- **A "pre-trip" inspection is conducted in order to verify that...**
 - The truck is in good mechanical condition.
 - Its load is positioned correctly and secured safely.
 - Any problems that had been noted at the end of its previous trip have been fixed.
- **Truckers are also required to monitor the condition of their vehicle and its cargo while they are on the road.**
 - These "en-route" inspections assure that any problems that develop during the trip can be identified and corrected before they become serious hazards.
- **The third type of inspection that CDL drivers are responsible for is a "post-trip" inspection.**
 - This looks for any problems that developed during the trip that require attention before the truck goes back out on the road.
 - As part of this inspection, drivers are required to fill out a Drivers Vehicle Inspection Report, a ("DVIR").
 - It can be in hardcopy or electronic form, and includes a checklist of the systems, parts and accessories that FMCSA says must be inspected at the end of a trip.

- **A DVIR also has signature lines so that drivers, mechanics and others can "sign off" on it at different stages of the inspection and maintenance process.**
 - By submitting a completed DVIR to their motor carrier, a driver communicates important safety information about their truck.
 - If there are no problems, the DVIR will be filed by the carrier (federal regulations require DVIRs to be kept for a minimum of three months).
 - Otherwise the DVIR is routed to the maintenance department, where the required maintenance and repairs are performed.
- **The fifth type of inspection that is addressed by the FMCSA is a "roadside" inspection.**
 - These are performed by state or federal inspectors or law enforcement officers while the truck is in transit.
 - The inspection can include an examination of not only the condition of a truck, its trailer and its cargo... but also of the driver, their license and their "hours of service" records.
- **Drivers must submit the reports that are generated by roadside inspections to their motor carriers within 24 hours of them taking place.**
- **For a professional truck driver, being ready and able to drive safely is part of their job description.**
 - But before you take a rig out on the road, the Federal Motor Carrier Administration (FMCSA) requires you to determine that the vehicle you will drive, and the cargo it carries is, "good to go" as well.
- **That is why you need to perform a "pre-trip" inspection, to identify any problems with the truck, the trailer or the load that could interfere with getting them to their destination safely.**
 - Catching these problems ahead of time can go a long way toward preventing breakdowns, accidents, injuries or worse, while you're in transit.
- **So an important first step in performing "pre-trip" inspections, is to check on any problems or maintenance issues that were identified during or after the previous trip.**
 - They will have been noted by the previous driver (this can be yourself or a coworker) in the Driver's Vehicle Inspection Report (DVIR) that was completed as part of the "post-trip" inspection.
- **If the "post-trip" inspection had shown no problems the DVIR will have been filed by the motor carrier.**

- **But if there were any problems with the truck or trailer, the DVIR would have immediately been forwarded to the carrier's maintenance department, so they could be taken care of.**
 - A service manager, mechanic or other company agent would have then signed the document to indicate that those issues had been resolved.
- **It is your responsibility to review the "post-trip" DVIR, and the signatures on it, to verify that the truck received the service it needed.**
 - When you are satisfied that it has, you should sign the DVIR yourself.
- **Even if there were no problems with the truck during its previous trip, a DVIR form can come in handy.**
 - You can use the inspection checklists that appear on the form to guide you in your "pre-trip" inspection.
- **A typical checklist includes a truck's:**
 - Steering system and horn.
 - Windshield wipers, lights, mirrors and reflectors.
 - Tires, wheels, rims, brakes and air systems.
 - Hoses, connectors, fasteners and emergency equipment.
 - Coupling equipment and "fifth wheels".
- **Whenever possible, your pre-trip inspection should also include checking on how the cargo that you'll be hauling was loaded and secured.**
- **This should include...**
 - The placement and arrangement of the cargo in the vehicle or trailer.
 - The condition of the load deck as well as the tie-downs, blocks and braces, and other equipment used to secure the cargo in place.
 - How these devices have been installed and adjusted.
- **FMCSA regulations recognize that this type of examination may not always be possible, so the requirements do not apply:**
 - To drivers of sealed commercial motor vehicles who have been instructed not to open them.
 - When the cargo has been loaded in a way that makes its examination "impractical".

- **The inspections that a driver performs on a commercial vehicle before and after each trip help to ensure that mechanical or other problems are identified and repaired before it heads back out on the road.**
 - But checking the condition of your truck and its cargo while you are in transit is also important.
- **In fact, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) regulations say you should check cargo loading and how it is secured not only before you start your run, but on a regular basis throughout the trip as well.**
- **A driver should perform these "en-route" checks:**
 - Within the first 50 miles of beginning their trip.
 - Whenever they change their duty status.
 - After every 3 hours or 150 miles of driving, whichever comes first.
- **In some situations, you may not be able to check your cargo because of the way it has been loaded, or because the load area has been sealed and you have instructions not to open it.**
 - In these cases, the FMCSA requirement for en-route cargo inspections does not apply.
 - But you should make a habit of performing "walkaround" inspections of your truck (and trailer if there is one) whenever you make a stop along the way.
- **What you should check can depend on the vehicle that you're driving, the cargo you're carrying, and the nature of the stop you're making.**
- **But in general, an en-route check should include the truck's:**
 - Lights.
 - Tires.
 - Wheel bearings.
 - Temperatures.
 - Emergency equipment.
- **You can conduct these "walkarounds" after making a delivery, stopping for a meal or refueling.**

- **During a fuel stop you should also take the time to check other fluid levels such as:**
 - Coolant.
 - Engine oil.
 - Wiper fluid.
- **So far we've been discussing en-route inspections that are performed by a truck's driver, but it's also important to mention "roadside" inspections, which can take place while a truck is "in transit", as well.**
 - More than three-and-a-half million of these inspections are conducted on commercial vehicles annually, so you need to be prepared for them.
- **Both state and federal inspectors can perform roadside inspections...**
 - When you stop at a weigh station.
 - If they notice that you have an equipment problem, such as low tire pressure.
 - "At random".
- **State troopers or other law enforcement personnel can also stop and inspect a vehicle "for cause".**
 - These inspections generally occur if officers notice something unsafe or illegal about the condition of a truck or its cargo, or the way the truck is being operated.
- **Roadside inspections that are conducted by inspectors or law enforcement are not necessarily limited to the truck itself.**
 - This can also include checking the driver for signs of drug and alcohol impairment.
- **If a roadside inspection finds serious problems, the trucker may not be allowed to continue their trip until the problems have been resolved.**
- **Another thing to remember is that the results of a roadside inspection are documented in a report that drivers must transmit or deliver to their motor carrier within 24 hours.**
 - So the ramifications can be significant.

- **Every vehicle inspection that a driver conducts is important.**
 - Performing them regularly helps you comply with federal regulations, and can prevent breakdowns, accidents and injuries from occurring on the road.
 - But the inspection that you perform at the end of your trip is crucial.
- **That's because Federal Motor Carrier Safety Association (FMCSA) regulations require drivers to fill out, sign and submit a "Drivers Vehicle Inspection Report" as part of the process.**
- **Known as a "DVIR", this report can be in hardcopy or electronic form, and ensures that important facts about the condition of your truck are communicated to the people in your organization who need to know them.**
- **A DVIR provides a detailed checklist of the parts and equipment that you are required to check in the inspection, including:**
 - Rails, support frames and coupling devices.
 - Tires, wheels, rims, brakes and air systems.
 - The steering system and horn.
 - Windshield wipers, lights, mirrors and reflectors.
 - Hoses, tie-downs, fasteners as well as emergency equipment.
 - Coupling equipment and "fifth wheels".
- **So you need to "check every box" on the list, and provide any additional pertinent information in the DVIR's "remarks" section.**
 - You are then required to sign the DVIR (either physically or electronically) and hand it in to your motor carrier.
- **If a completed DVIR does not identify any mechanical or maintenance problems, a motor carrier will keep the document on file for at least three months.**
 - But if there are problems that need to be taken care of, the DVIR is immediately directed to the maintenance department.
- **Once the truck's necessary maintenance has been performed or repairs made, the mechanic or service manager will sign the DVIR to indicate that they are satisfied that the vehicle is safe to operate.**

- **Then, next time the truck is used, the driver is required to review the DVIR and the signatures on it as part of their "pre-trip" inspection.**
 - When the driver is satisfied that the truck is safe and ready to roll, they sign the DVIR as well.
 - This element of personal accountability helps to ensure a high level of safety for everyone on the road.

***** SUMMARY *****

- **By complying with federal inspection and maintenance requirements commercial drivers can keep their trucks running right and move loads efficiently while promoting safety on the road.**
- **The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) requires motor carriers to implement a program of regular inspection and maintenance for the trucks that they operate.**
- **Drivers play an important role in this program, and are responsible for inspecting their trucks, trailers and cargo before, during and after a trip.**
- **If there are problems with a truck, the next driver must review and sign the DVIR to verify that they have been addressed and the truck is safe to drive.**
- **Now that you understand why, when and how you should inspect the trucks that you drive, you can help make public roads safer for everyone who uses them... every day!**