



Have a Happy
and Safe
Memorial Day.
Please
remember all
men and women
who have died
in military
service to the
United States.

BRAKES, LIGHTS, AND TIRES

Regardless of the trucking industry events that we attend throughout the year, ATA, NACV, Mid America Trucking Show and gatherings of truckload, LTL, intermodal, private, moving & storage, and tanker fleets, there is typically a seminar session covering the common maintenance issues that are found during vehicle roadside inspections. For most fleets, regardless of their specific trucking niche, the top three maintenance-related issues are consistently brakes, lights, and tires - not necessarily in any particular order. The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) concurs that the top violations & resultant citations come from those three.

Since fleets are aware that these issues are prevalent and being scrutinized by CVSA, why do citations continue to be written for them after all these years? That is the \$1000 question.

Light issues should be easily checked by the drivers in their daily vehicle walk-around to confirm that all the lights are working properly. However, many drivers just do not want to take the extra time to have maintenance get the lights repaired/replaced before the trip even though it's clearly a safety issue if some are not functioning. While driving at night recently near a bustling Virginia port, I was amazed at the high percentage of container chassis running with one or more lights out. Newer technologies provide easy light-out detection. Many fleets are including this feature in their specifications.

There is discussion around the responsibility of the driver to determine if the brakes are out of adjustment. Unless the brakes are equipped with some type of visual indicator or electronic sensor (which very few currently are), it is very difficult for a driver to check. Most of the time, this becomes a technician responsibility. Automatic Slack (brake) adjusters (ASA) are mandated, but they still require maintenance and inspection to ensure proper performance. Conversion to air disc brakes provides benefits in this area as compared to conventional drum brakes with ASA's.

Analysis of the CSA tire citation data is very interesting. Tread depth below the

legal limit is one of several major reasons why citations occur when vehicles are inspected. The legal limit is 4/32" for steer tires and 2/32" for all other wheel positions. The big problem with drivers is that they may visually inspect a tire for low tread depth but only look at one small section of the tire. In many cases, the low spot of the tire may be well below the legal limit but the driver happens to be inspecting the tire only at the 12 o'clock position where there is plenty of remaining rubber. Drivers should be trained to measure tire tread depth in several locations around the circumference and in more than one groove. Issues such as a brake skid or fast shoulder wear can create localized areas on a tire that could generate a CVSA violation.

Finding a tire below the legal tread depth during a roadside inspection will place the vehicle out of service. The driver is then obliged to arrange for an expensive roadside service call to get a replacement tire and get back on the road. The same goes for a "flat" tire which is defined as 50% or more below the air pressure molded onto the tire sidewall. A typical 11R22.5 radial tire has a maximum allowable pressure of 120 psi. When the tire is measured to be 60 psi or below, the tire is considered flat and the vehicle is now out of service. The driver is NOT allowed to drive to the next truck stop to get air.

Checking tires with a calibrated pressure gauge during the driver walk-around is clearly worth the time and effort. Any low tire can be either replaced or repaired if the tire is underinflated because of puncture or damage. There is really no excuse for getting a citation for an underinflated or flat tire. Using a billy club or baseball bat to check tires cannot accurately identify the tire inflation pressure. Only if the baseball bat is used to thump a tire with 0 psi will the driver likely be able to tell the tire is completely flat.

Fleets could reduce some of their brake, light and tire citations by running a serious training class for both technicians and drivers. This instruction would also reduce roadside service calls and improve just in time delivery and safety.

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