

# Safety only priority of commercial vehicle inspection

Last week our officers along with Commercial Vehicle Enforcement, Alberta Sheriffs, RCMP, the Lethbridge County Community Peace Officer and Alberta Transportation Dangerous Goods, Vehicle and Rail Safety, conducted a joint-forcers commercial vehicle inspection that resulted in two-thirds of the big rigs we checked to be placed out of service – meaning they weren't safe to be on the road.

Over the course of this three-day project, a total of 91 vehicles were checked. Of those, 60 vehicles were immediately placed out of service due to significant equipment failures and other violations, 13 vehicles were found to have violations that required attention and only 18 vehicles actually passed the inspection.

Unfortunately, these numbers aren't just an anomaly or one-off. They're actually on par with the results of previous commercial vehicle inspections. The nay-sayers (and we see them commenting on our social media accounts) argue that this inspection and other Check Stops, are just a cash grab. A few even went so far to suggest that vehicles are placed out of service for the most minor of contravention. That couldn't be further from the truth but we'll probably never change their minds. Some people just don't get it.

The reality is some – not all – truckers and trucking companies are negligent. They are the ones who put everyone at risk. They are the ones these inspections target; the ones who are taken off the road.

In talking to officers who regularly conduct these inspections the two most prevalent violations detected are brake defects and cargo securement issues – hardly minor infractions when

you consider the size and weight of these big vehicles and their potential for damage and harm if their brakes fail or their load shifts or just plain falls off.

Placing a vehicle out of service occurs when there is a clear violation specified under the Commercial Vehicle Inspections Regulations with respect to the following major categories: brakes, frames, cargo, suspension, tires and wheels, dangerous goods, exhaust, coupling devices, steering, hours of service and driver documents. And typically the worst of the worst offenders have multiple violations.

So what did we encounter during this inspection? Here's a sampling of just a few cases:

- Commercial truck with enclosed trailer weighing 15,000 kilograms. Automatic transmission with no parking gear, emergency brake in the truck not working, no working brakes on the trailer (including service brakes which apply while driving to slow and stop and breakaway emergency brakes, which are a safety requirement to stop a trailer should it become detached from the towing vehicle). Truck and trailer towed for repairs.

- Commercial truck and trailer weighing 11,793 kg with safety chains so worn down from dragging on the road there was insufficient strength to safely keep the trailer connected to the towing vehicle.

- Commercial vehicle with parking brake and emergency brake not functioning, also carrying cargo using a strap or straps not rated to safely secure the cargo.

- Commercial truck and trailer where the trailer's load or cargo exceeded what the trailer was designed to safely carry. (This impacts the safe operation of the vehicle and can result in sudden and unexpected failure of other trailer components).

A number of years ago I was driving on the 401 in Ontario

going 100 km/h when a rusted nut on an 18-wheeler came flying off and busted through my rear passenger window. Thankfully it was just the window that was damaged but it could have been a lot worse. It ticked me off to say the least because it could have been prevented if the vehicle had simply been properly maintained.

I've said it before and I'll say it again – all drivers have a responsibility to share the road safely. Whether you're driving a compact passenger car or a truck and trailer unit, safety must be a priority.

I want to end off by pointing out there are plenty of responsible truckers and trucking companies out there who maintain their vehicles to ensure the safety of their employees and other road users. These are the good guys; the ones who keep their logs up to date, don't let operators drive longer than they should, make sure a vehicle is in proper working order before heading out, address minor problems before they get to a point where major repairs are needed and obey the many other regulations that govern the industry. So to all those drivers and companies who are committed to professionalism and operating in safety, thank you for your diligence.