

Vehicle Inspections

1. Pre-trip inspection requirements.

A pre-trip inspection is conducted prior to each trip to help identify problems that could cause a breakdown or accident. Section 396.13 states that before driving a commercial motor vehicle the driver must:

- * be satisfied that the vehicle is in safe operating condition;
- * review the last vehicle inspection report (see post-trip inspection in this training program); and
- * sign the report, only if defects or deficiencies were noted by the driver who prepared the report, to acknowledge that the driver has reviewed the report and certified that the repairs needed were performed.

Though the regulations do not require a driver to complete a full written pre-trip report, there are several items that must be checked before hitting the road each day. Section 392.7 states that a commercial motor vehicle may not be driven until the driver makes sure the following parts and accessories are in good working order:

- * service brakes, including trailer brake connections;
- * parking (hand) brake;
- * steering mechanism;
- * lighting devices and reflectors;
- * tires;
- * horn;
- * windshield wiper(s);
- * rear-vision mirror(s); and
- * coupling devices.

Section 392.8 states that a commercial motor vehicle may not be driven unless the driver has checked the vehicle's emergency equipment required in Sec. 393.95 (fire extinguisher(s), spare fuses, liquid burning emergency flares, reflective triangles) to make sure they are in place and ready for use when needed.

2. Seven step method used for conducting a pre-trip inspection.

By doing a pre-trip inspection the same way every time, a driver is less likely to forget to check an important vehicle component. Many drivers follow the seven step method listed below:

- 1) **Vehicle overview.** This includes a check of the truck's general condition.
- 2) **Engine compartment.** Items that should be systematically checked include engine oil level, coolant level, automatic transmission fluid (if applicable), hoses, belts, wires, and battery and other electrical connections.
- 3) **Inside the cab.** This includes a check of all gauges and controls to make sure they are working correctly and reporting normal conditions.

4) Lights. Low beam headlights, four-way flashers, and high beam headlights should be inspected.

5) Walk-around inspection. A walk-around inspection should cover the entire vehicle's exterior. The inspection should be systematic starting at the vehicle's front left side. It should continue as follows:

- * front;
- * right side;
- * rear;
- * left rear;
- * left side; and
- * coupling system.

6) Signal lights. All signal lights and stop lights should be in proper working order.

7) Final brake system check. All brakes from the parking brake to service brakes should be checked to ensure they are in proper working order.

3. On-the-road inspections.

Section 392.9 requires the driver to follow certain inspection rules while on the road. Within the first 50 miles of a trip, a commercial motor vehicle's cargo and load-securing devices must be checked. Any necessary adjustments must be made at this time. After the first 50 miles the vehicle's cargo and load-securing devices must be reexamined:

- * when the driver makes a change of duty status;
- * after the vehicle has been driven for 3 hours; or
- * after the vehicle has been driven 150 miles - whichever occurs first.

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

4. Post-trip inspections.

At the end of a driver's day of work on a commercial motor vehicle he/she must complete a post-trip inspection. Section 396.11 requires a driver to fill out a written report covering at least the following parts and accessories:

- * service brakes, including trailer brake connections;
- * parking (hand) brake;
- * steering mechanism;
- * lighting devices and reflectors;
- * tires;
- * horn;
- * windshield wiper(s);
- * rear-vision mirror(s);
- * coupling devices;

- * wheels and rims; and
- * emergency equipment.

On the report the driver must identify the vehicle and list any defect or deficiency which could affect its safe operation or cause a mechanical breakdown. If no defects or deficiencies are found, that must also be noted on the report. In all cases the driver must sign the report upon completion of the inspection. If a driver operates more than one vehicle in a day, he/she must complete a report for each vehicle operated. On two driver operations, only one driver needs to sign the report, provided both drivers agree with what is written in the report. Before the vehicle can be operated again, any items listed as being defective or deficient that may affect the safety of the vehicle must be repaired.

The following criteria must be met:

- * the motor carrier must certify on the report that the defect or deficiency has been corrected or that the correction was not necessary to safely operate the vehicle; and
- * the motor carrier must retain the original copy of each vehicle inspection report and certification of repairs for at least 3 months from the date it was completed.