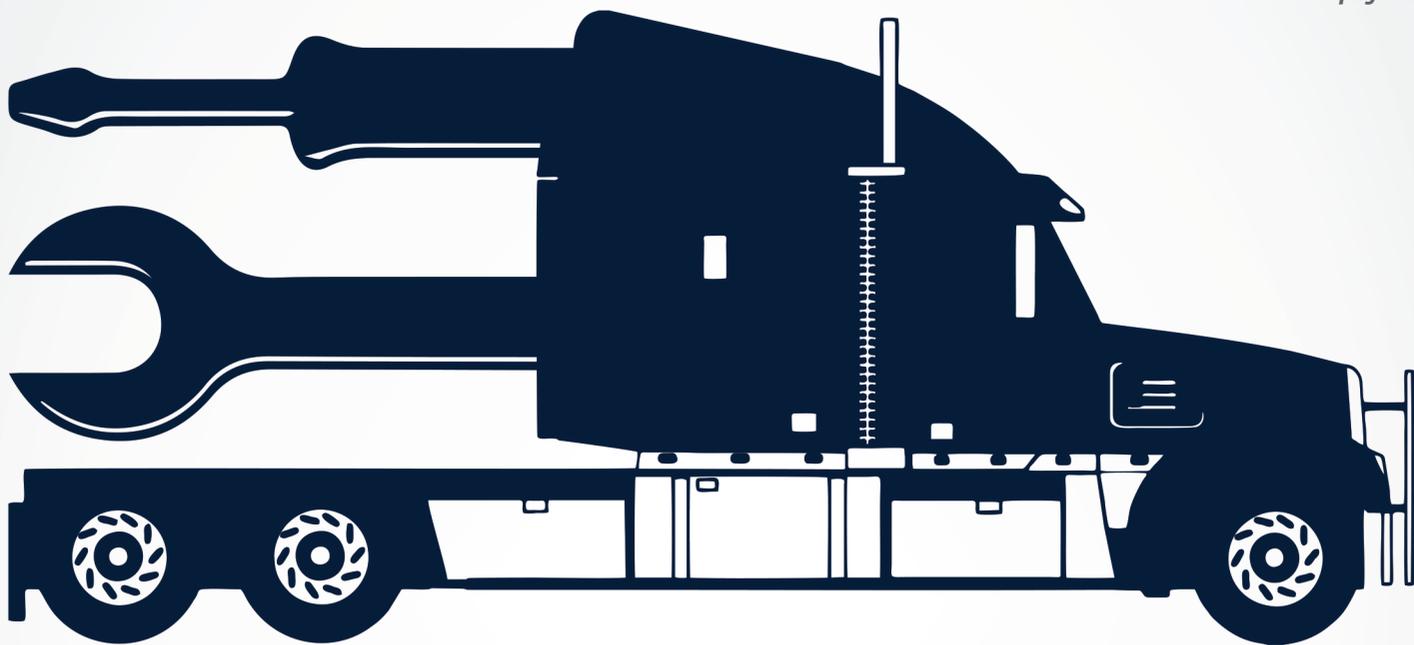


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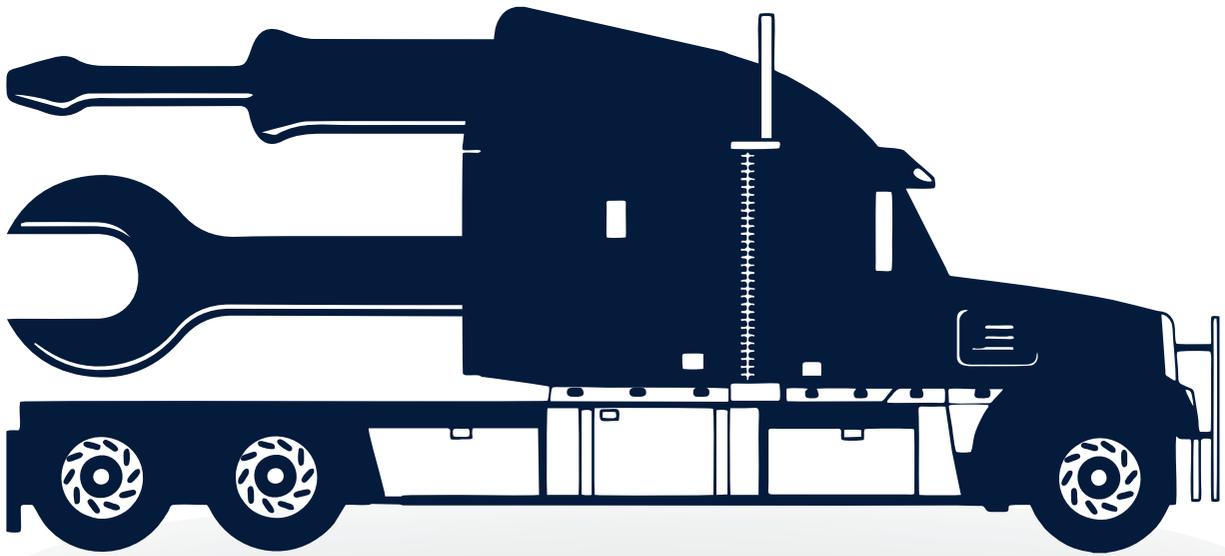
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SOUND STRATEGIES

Industry veterans offer advice on what it takes to run an effective fleet maintenance program in the CSA era

BY JEFF CRISSEY

When the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration launched its Compliance Safety Accountability program in December 2010, it marked the dawn of a new era for fleet maintenance managers.

The new safety measurement program sharpened the agency's focus on targeting poor-performing fleets for intervention, and possibly shutdown orders.

In many of CSA's Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories – such as Unsafe Driving and Controlled Substances/Alcohol – the driver is directly responsible for compliance. For

the Vehicle Maintenance BASIC, however, a fleet's maintenance program is put under the microscope.

Violations related to lights, brakes and tires are the most commonly cited at roadside inspections. With the exception of proper pre-trip and post-trip inspections by the driver, all of these fall under the purview of the maintenance team. Developing a maintenance strategy to deal with these and other CSA-related issues can help improve a carrier's scores.

Here are eight tips from four of the leading fleet maintenance professionals in the industry today to help you develop and maintain a proactive maintenance plan.



Violations related to lights, brakes and tires are the most commonly cited at roadside inspections.

TIP 1: GET SPECIFIC ON YOUR PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE CHECKLIST

Be as detailed as possible when wording the instructions on a preventive maintenance checklist, says Darryl Stuart, president and CEO of DWS Fleet Management Services.

"If you look at the average PM checklist, it just says, 'Check brakes,' but what does 'check' mean?" asks Stuart. "The term 'check' or 'inspect' means different things to different people and is widely interpreted." Unclear wording on PM checklists increases the likelihood that a technician inspection won't be thorough.

"Take brakes," says Stuart. "A proper PM sheet should include proper stroke dimensions and instructions on checking bushings and slack adjusters. It helps them hone in on what they should be looking for so it's not up to interpretation."

TIP 2: DEVELOP CONSISTENCY AMONG MAINTENANCE FACILITIES

Stuart also offers advice for fleets with maintenance operations at multiple locations. "CSA forces fleets to make sure they have consistency," he says. "If you have a fleet that has eight service locations, I guarantee you by the time you get to the eighth one, consistency doesn't exist."

Stuart recommends working closely with maintenance managers across a company's terminals to ensure consistent procedures are followed, creating a culture of pride in proper PM programs.

Stuart also cautions fleets that rely too heavily on independent maintenance providers, saying their business model is focused on volume. "The fact is that service is often 'Wham, bam, thank you ma'am,'" he says. "They probably face the same problems with an ambiguous PM checklist."

"If you are doing a quality PM inspection within your own shops and it is consistent between all your locations, the chances of you having to use a third-party facility for in-route repairs are rare," says Stuart.

TIP 4: LEARN FROM YOUR ROADSIDE INSPECTIONS

In the event a truck is pulled over for inspection, the resulting inspection report provides a standalone opportunity for the driver, safety manager and maintenance team to assess and learn from any violations, says Joe Stianche, fleet maintenance and safety manager for Peco Foods.

"When we are inspected, that incident is worked through both safety and maintenance and discussed in detail on a weekly conference call," says Stianche. Reports with defects are discussed as to location issue or overall maintenance deficiency. The company even reviews clean roadside inspections.

To demonstrate proper corrective action and provide recovery of requested data in the event of an audit, Peco Foods keeps copies of all roadside inspections, filing them in the maintenance jacket and attaching them to a repair order, if required.

"I can assure you in an audit situation that vehicles involved in roadside inspections and accidents will be reviewed as part of the maintenance portion of the audit," says Stianche. "Timely retrieval of both the inspection and corrective action is essential."



DARRY STUART is president and CEO of DWS Fleet Management Services and past chairman of the Technology & Maintenance Council.

He currently provides "limited-time executive" options for carriers looking to overhaul their maintenance practices. The industry veteran has 47 years of fleet management experience, including roles at United Truck Leasing, Keen Leasing, Cressler Trucking and Lily Transportation. Stuart received CCJ's Technology & Maintenance Career Leadership Award in 1998.

TIP 3: RETHINK YOUR TREAD DEPTH TOLERANCES

A common fleet maintenance practice is to run tires all the way to the minimum tread depth limits before replacing them. Stuart argues that you shouldn't have a long-term approach to tire replacement.

"I approach maintenance from PM to PM," says Stuart. "If the tires can't make it from the current PM to the next, you need to change them. The majority of CSA violations for tires are for those worn below the DOT requirements. If a fleet has any tire that is cited for 2/32-inch or less, it is purely maintenance management inconsistency."

Stuart believes in replacing tires between 4/32-inch and 6/32-inch tread depth. "Tire costs average about 10 dollars per 1/32-inch," he says. "If I leave an extra 2/32-inch of tread on the tire, that 20 dollars is nothing compared to the cost of a road call, driver downtime and potentially a missed delivery."



JOE STIANCHE is fleet maintenance and safety manager for Bay Springs, Miss.-based Peco Foods. Prior to that,

he was president of fleet consulting firm J.M. Stianche Services. Stianche also has served as vice president of maintenance for KLLM Transport and worked for Royal Trucking and Sanderson Farms. He has been active in TMC since 1978, serving on the board of directors and participating in the organization's S6 Engine Task Force. Stianche received CCJ's Technology & Maintenance Career Leadership Award in 2012.

TIP 5: GET TO KNOW LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

An adversarial approach to roadside inspectors doesn't pay in the long run, says Stianche. Fleets that foster good relationships with local and state law enforcement agencies will benefit from their expertise.

Peco Foods invites enforcement officers to the company's annual safety banquets and into its shops to train technicians and drivers on Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance criteria and proper inspections.

"In the event that we question an inspection item, we will contact those officers for clarification or rebuttal," says Stianche.

Since CSA was implemented in 2010, Peco Foods' CSA scores have risen from the bottom 25th percentile facing intervention to the top 25th percentile today. "It takes several years to do that because of how the data stays with you, but it can be done if everyone is on board," says Stianche.



If a truck is pulled over for inspection, the resulting report provides an opportunity for the driver, safety manager and maintenance team to assess and learn from any violations.

TIP 6: EXPECT MORE FROM OUTSOURCED MAINTENANCE PROVIDERS

Maverick Transportation, a leading flatbed operation based in Little Rock, Ark., has four service center locations in the eastern half of the United States located in high-density lanes. But a portion of the fleet's assets never operate near one of Maverick's facilities, so the company relies on shops at dealerships, truck stops and tire stores to keep its assets rolling.

In an effort to improve repair times and reduce CSA violations for trucks that operate away from its maintenance terminals, Maverick developed a network of district service managers who meet with those service providers and perform facility audits on everything from OSHA and EPA compliance to the types of tools they use.

Maverick also sends monthly e-mail bulletins to its outsourced service network to "address hot-button maintenance or repair items we are seeing and SOPs on how to repair these particular items, whether it be a 'check engine' light or a recall notice," says Mike Jeffress, vice president of maintenance. "We are trying to help ourselves get in and out of those facilities more efficiently."

Maverick also has developed scorecards that DSMs use to evaluate how well maintenance

vendors are meeting the company's needs. If necessary, the company will provide training on best-practice procedures to ensure the level of service they are receiving matches that of their in-house maintenance facilities.

Jeffress maintains a fleet doesn't have to have a thousand power units to establish excellence from outsourced maintenance providers. "It all comes back to your ability and willingness to pick up the phone or send an email and let the service provider know who you are and what you expect from service."



MIKE JEFFRESS

is vice president of maintenance for Maverick Transportation.

He joined the

Little Rock, Ark.-based company in 1986 as an entry-level technician. Jeffress is a past TMC chairman and general chairman of the Arkansas State Maintenance Council and a member of the Professional Technician Development Committee. He holds a number of honors and industry recognitions, including a Silver Spark Plug award from TMC in 2003 and CCJ's Technology & Maintenance Career Leadership Award in 2010.

TIP 7: EMPHASIZE PRE- AND POST-TRIP INSPECTIONS

As the only set of eyes on the vehicle when it's out on the road, drivers play an important role in identifying potential maintenance issues on trucks and trailers and notifying fleet managers that a problem needs to be addressed.

Too often, however, a driver's pre- or post-trip inspection consists of nothing more than a quick trip around the equipment, thumping a tire iron against the sidewalls to determine proper inflation.

Hunt Valley, Md.-based Dunbar Armored has provided armored services for almost 100 years. Today, the company operates roughly 1,500 trucks and prides itself on its low CSA scores.

When CSA began, Dunbar Armored took the opportunity to emphasize the importance of proper pre- and post-

trip inspection procedures to its drivers. The company's efforts start with safety department personnel present each morning as vehicles are loaded to verify that pre-trip inspections are being completed accurately.

Dunbar Armored's maintenance staff assists drivers by checking tires, brakes, lights, leaks and other commonly cited CSA violations on a regular basis. Doug White, the company's vice president of fleet maintenance, says they also are emphasizing fluid level checks.

"When fluid checks are being completed, we have a check sheet that is used and signed off by the staff on a weekly basis verifying that we do not have any obvious issues that could cause our vehicles to be taken out of service at a roadside inspection,"

White says. "These additional steps have provided us with an additional verification level. We continually look for ways to improve our processes and don't hesitate to make changes that will provide improvements."



DOUG WHITE

is vice president of fleet maintenance for Dunbar Armored and the current TMC chairman

for 2016-17. At Dunbar, White oversees a fleet of more than 1,500 specialized trucks, 80 facilities and 66 maintenance operations. He previously worked at Beltway International Trucks, Cloverland Dairies and Keen Leasing. White received *CCJ's* Technology & Maintenance Career Leadership Award in 2015.

TIP 8: MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF CORROSION TO LIMIT LIGHTING VIOLATIONS

A missing or broken light is the most visible CSA violation and provides law enforcement personnel cause to initiate a roadside inspection.

Newer LED lamps offer extended bulb life compared to traditional truck lamps and are quickly dropping in price. But switching out to LEDs isn't enough to limit your exposure to lighting violations.

Road salt and chemical sprays applied to icy roads during winter months – particularly in the Northeast and Midwest – can wreak havoc on truck and trailer wiring systems, eating through harnesses and connection points and rendering lights and other electrical components inoperable.

"Lights are difficult to manage and probably a tad unfair because of corrosion," says Stuart. "A truck and trailer can leave a PM today and the lights be OK, only to go down the road 12 miles and have corrosion eliminate the light."

To minimize the effects of corrosion on lighting systems, have drivers and maintenance personnel routinely check for loose or broken lamp housings and lenses. In the winter months, check wiring connections, materials and coatings in the "hot zone" – the area up to 42 inches off the ground most exposed to road spray – and replace components at the first sign of corrosion.



Consider replacing conventional lamps with longer-life LED lamps that can offer better performance in environments where lighting systems are susceptible to corrosion.

Photo courtesy of Optronics International, LLC.

Add splash guards to reduce road spray from reaching components, and consider routine high-pressure truck washes using solvents to remove salts and chemicals from sensitive components.

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