

The Truck Stops Here!

Sorting Out Responsibility & Training

by Sean D. Shields

Let's start with an obvious statement: as a component manufacturer, you spend a considerable amount of time designing and constructing structural building components. Here's another one: you make a considerable investment in your raw materials and have significant costs associated with owning and running your production facility. One more: every component you spend the time and effort to build you hand over to a singular employee, a truck driver, who has 100 percent control and responsibility for ensuring your product gets to your customer safely and intact.

Let me put that last statement a slightly different way, for emphasis: **your company's ultimate success or failure is extremely dependent upon the skills and performance of your truck driver as they transport your products out the front gate of your facility and deliver them to your customer's jobsite.** Gives you a moment of pause, doesn't it?

Chances are good you're always looking for ways to reduce your risk, streamline your operations, enhance your reputation, expand market share and, ultimately, improve your business. Then consider, for a moment,

your drivers. How did you evaluate their skills prior to hiring them? Were they properly trained once they were hired? Are they fully aware of their responsibilities before, during and after they transport your products to the jobsite? Are you fully aware of your responsibilities?

In a 2004 industry survey, over 85 percent of component manufacturer respondents indicated they owned or leased their own fleet of commercial motor vehicles (CMV). Of those respondents, only a third (35 percent) indicated they had developed what they considered to be a formal driver training program. Even beyond educating and training your drivers, it's important for you to understand all the risk and responsibility your company assumes in transporting its products.

It is this liability that is prompting more and more insurance carriers to promote or even require more comprehensive driver training. WTCA staff spoke with one component manufacturer who was recently approached by his insurance company to institute such a program. He hadn't even filed a claim, yet he was told he needed to institute a formal program.

For these reasons, WTCA is currently developing comprehensive training to address product transport called, WTCA's TRUCK Program—Industry Best Practices. This article will briefly outline the various aspects of the program and discuss why you may want to consider adopting the program, with or without prompting from your insurance carrier!

Your Company's Responsibility

Prior to the point where the truck pulls out of your facility, your company has complete responsibility for each truck and trailer, including maintenance, insurance and registration. You must acquire any necessary permits if a truck is going to haul a load that exceeds the maximum allowed size restrictions. You are also responsible for providing safety signage, flags and lights for the truck, trailer and load, as well as escort vehicles when a permit requires them.

You are also responsible for making sure your driver has a Commercial Drivers License (CDL). Drivers have been required to have a CDL in order to drive a CMV since April 1, 1992. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has developed and issued standards for testing and licensing CMV drivers.¹ Among other things, the standards require individual states to issue CDLs to CMV drivers only after the driver passes knowledge and skills tests administered by the state related to the type of vehicle to be operated. Tickets and other infractions while operating a CMV can impact a driver's eligibility to hold a CDL. You need to keep track of a driver's record to make sure they still hold a valid CDL before you employ them to haul your products.

All of these responsibilities require a plan of action and, more often than not, a lot of paperwork. The TRUCK program will train individuals within your company to handle the many responsibilities you assume when you own and operate your own fleet of trucks (and, to a lesser extent, if you contract out to a third-party common carrier). TRUCK will also include training on your clerical responsibilities, including insurance forms, permit applications, driver logs, vehicle maintenance records and vehicle registration.

Your Driver's Responsibility

Then there is the issue of driver responsibility. Once the truck leaves your manufacturing facility, the driver assumes full and complete responsibility of the vehicle and the cargo it is transporting.

Not to sound like an after school special, but knowledge is power—your drivers need to know this! If they speed, they get the ticket. If the truck's tags are expired, they get the ticket. If the load is illegal or the permit they have is deemed invalid, they get the ticket. If they get in an accident, you guessed it, they get the ticket (assuming one is issued).

Drivers should inspect their vehicle and trailer, all tie downs, anchor points and other load securement methods, and the load itself before departure. The driver is also required to ensure cargo is properly distributed, does not obscure the forward or left and right view from the driver's seat, or prevent access to emergency accessories (flares, cones, etc.) or a viable exit from the cab of the truck.

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¹For more information on this program, visit <http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration-licensing/cdl/cdl.htm>.



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A new tool to get your fleet on the road safely and with minimal risk.

at a glance

- Proper training and management of truck drivers is a way to reduce risk, streamline operations, and enhance your reputation.
- TRUCK is a new fleet management and safety program designed to train drivers about their responsibilities on the road and at the jobsite.



Transportation Manager

"The buck stops here" is a simple statement about assuming responsibility. In this case, through the WTCA TRUCK Program, your company chooses an individual who then claims, "the truck stops here!" It is important not only for you, but for the drivers you hire to be clear on your commitment to their training and ultimate success in their job. Instituting a formal driver training program starts with choosing the right person to assume responsibility for it.

The TRUCK program will help the transportation manager to assess your company's current risk given the structure and scope of your fleet. It will also help them, if necessary, evaluate and choose proper insurance coverage and provide guidance on maintaining an effective vehicle registration system.

TRUCK will also help you and your transportation manager make one of your most important decisions: choosing who you hire to drive your trucks. It will include best practices on developing expectations for your drivers with regard to their driving performance (and history), drug and alcohol use, proper work attire, and attitude (particularly on the jobsite). With these expectations in place, it becomes easier to evaluate and contrast potential hires.

As discussed earlier, TRUCK will also include training and guidance on creating a comprehensive vehicle maintenance and inspection schedule. Keeping your trucks road worthy, particularly through preventative maintenance to ensure small part failures don't lead to large mechanical problems, is one of the most effective things your company can do to lower the overall cost of transporting your product and reduce delays.

Driver

Your drivers are the face of your company on the road. Their actions and skills determine whether your product makes it to your customer to their satisfaction. It only makes sense to ensure they are well trained to assume the heavy responsibilities they accept every time they pull their truck out of your facility. The TRUCK program will provide that base industry-specific training.

If they don't already have a CDL, it will guide them on how to apply for one, prepare for the test, and maintain that licensure during their career. The program will also cover the basics of driving a CMV, as well as some of the particular issues your drivers may face on the road (for example, making a wide right turn with an uncentered load when the peak of the trusses hang off the right side of the vehicle).

Law enforcement can spend a considerable amount of time inspecting your CMVs either at weigh stations or on the side of the road if they pull it over. In most instances, they

will conduct a 21-point inspection of the truck and trailer. TRUCK will outline this inspection process and train drivers how to conduct this inspection on their own before they head out on the road. This "pre-trip" inspection will help minimize the chances law enforcement will find something wrong during their inspection and thus avoid citations. Law enforcement will also likely inspect the cargo, its positioning and its securement. If they find anything wrong during their inspection, and it can't be fixed immediately, they can place the vehicle "out-of-service," until a different vehicle is brought to transport the cargo. This can mean costly delays and affect your company's reputation.

Finally, the TRUCK program will train drivers on how to work with the specific products manufactured by the industry. Your products offer some unique challenges, particularly during the loading and offloading process, that a driver should be properly trained to handle. This program will offer best practices on loading and positioning of cargo, safe and thorough application of load securement devices (such as nylon strap tie-downs), and selecting or creating a safe and adequate location to unload components at the jobsite.

Record Keeper

Few other aspects of your business will require as much paperwork as your transportation fleet. From insurance and vehicle registration to over-sized load permits and driver logs, there are a lot of forms and files to collect and maintain in order to comply with local, state and federal regulations. Out of necessity, all of this record keeping may be done by the same person you appoint as your certified transportation manager. However, if you want a member of your clerical staff to take responsibility for your transportation paperwork, the TRUCK program will include specific training on record keeping.

Risk Management

It is important to point out that effective driver training and transportation management has as much to do with addressing risk as it does legal compliance. First, the customer is paying for a timely and damage-free delivery. Second, damaged cargo from driver error can result in claims against your company, hurt your reputation and impact your profitability. Third, insufficiently secured cargo, improperly maintained equipment, or poor driving can lead to an accident resulting in injury or loss of property, as well as citations from law enforcement and potential litigation.

For example, improperly securing truss loads has proven to result in insurance claims. Specifically, data obtained from



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CNA Insurance, for the years CNA maintained WTCA's truss industry insurance program, showed that for CNA truss manufacturer insureds, 36 percent of the claims were vehicle-related. Of those claims, 148 had to do with clearance issues. These losses occurred on trucks delivering over-hanging trusses to jobsites that struck something. The next most frequent number of losses, 93, occurred when objects fell off vehicles and struck something.

The TRUCK program will offer best practices on what your company should do in the event of an accident. If an accident occurs, it will require the action by all three of these individuals. The program will train each of them on what their responsibilities are and what they should do to help minimize company liability.

Conclusion

Product transport is one of the greatest sources of risk and liability a component manufacturer faces. It also presents a significant injury risk to your employers and others, from loading and unloading of product, to travel on public roads. As a consequence, WTCA's Management Committee is creating the TRUCK program to help you appoint and train an effective transportation manager to take responsibility for maintaining your transportation fleet. The TRUCK program will also offer industry-specific training for your drivers and provide guidance on proper record keeping. **SBC**

If you are interested in more information on this program, please contact Sean at WTCA, 608/310-6728 or sshields@qualtim.com.



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For components transported long distances, the driver has an additional responsibility to inspect the cargo and its securement while in transit. At a minimum, the driver must ensure adequate tension of securement devices within the first 50 miles of the trip, when their duty status changes (i.e., they stop to sleep or eat), or after three hours or 150 miles.

The TRUCK program will train drivers how to conduct proper pre-trip inspections on their vehicles, the load, and all load securement devices, as well as provide proper techniques or procedures to use in order to fix any problems they find. In the end, because the driver assumes full responsibility when they leave, they have a right and an obligation to refuse to leave if they find anything wrong. Outside your plant, they are your company's representative to all the motorists they share the road with. Their actions and the performance of your vehicles should reflect the impression you want to make in your marketplace.

Training

The structure of WTCA's TRUCK program is modeled loosely on WTCA's Operation Safety program, in that it will focus on training and certifying one individual within your company to manage transport of your products. Upon completion of the program, that one employee will know how to manage and run a comprehensive driver hiring and training program; institute a comprehensive safety program as it pertains to CMVs and cargo transport; implement driver safety incentive and driver discipline programs; and conduct proper record keeping. TRUCK will also contain a complete industry-specific driver training program your company can use for both new hires and experienced drivers. Finally, the program will contain training on proper record keeping for clerical employees.

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