

Safety Recommendations: Climbing Tanker Trucks for Sampling or Inspection Purposes

by Mike Sikula, NYS Bureau of Weights & Measures

Weights and measures programs across the country are critical to our nation's infrastructure, ensuring equity in the commercial marketplace. While working in the marketplace, officials are sometimes exposed to potentially hazardous situations so safety awareness is critical.

As part of their daily work, officials occasionally have to crawl, climb or squeeze through an area to gain access for sampling, testing or inspection purposes. One of the most dangerous of these activities, in jurisdictions that allow it, is climbing on top of tanker trucks to take a petroleum sample or to perform an inspection of the piping for the metering system. In response to heightened safety awareness in recent years, many jurisdictions have prohibited climbing tanker trucks or have drastically limited the instances of when (or where) it is permitted.

Climbing tanker trucks can be not only a safety concern for weights and measures officials, it may also violate the safety policy of the establishment the inspector is visiting. In fact, a prohibition against climbing tanker trucks is often found at wholesale petroleum terminals. It is highly recommended that any jurisdiction considering climbing a tanker truck discuss this with their own legal department, especially when the activity is against the policy of the establishment or the owner.

With safety and liability concerns regarding climbing tanker trucks on the rise, simply prohibiting this activity may be the wisest decision, but it is also important for jurisdictions that prohibit climbing to understand that this may make it easier for unscrupulous delivery companies to hide fraudulent piping. New York inspectors have seen examples of this type of activity occur and have uncovered pipe valves that were concealed on top of tankers in order to introduce air into systems with disabled air eliminators.

This article is not meant to take a position on a 'to climb' or 'do not climb' policy, but rather identify the concerns on both sides, and stress the importance of comprehensive safety policies and procedures. For jurisdictions that allow inspectors to climb tanker trucks, the following safety actions are recommended:

- Develop written policies and procedures for climbing tanker trucks. Examples include:
 - Require personal protective equipment (PPE) such as footwear, head protection, slip resistant gloves, etc.
 - Use the three-point system (Both Hands & 1 Foot or Both Feet & 1 Hand)
 - Always face the tanker when climbing (going up or down).
 - Do not carry any items when you climb.
 - Maintain a firm grip.
- Submit the policy to the appropriate agency for review and approval.
- Only allow inspectors who have completed the program to climb tanker trucks.

Another very important consideration is the availability of manifold flush systems that allow drivers to flush hoses without the need to climb on top of tanker trucks. While this does not directly relate to weights and measures duties, it does help protect our counterparts in industry. These systems may also aid the weights and measures official since it allows for much easier return of product during testing.

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets Bureau of Weights and Measures is currently developing a safety training program for its inspectors who climb tanker trucks.

Please remember to make safety discussions a part of all your staff meetings.