

Vehicle Safety Issues for Weights and Measures Inspector

You might be a seasoned driver who has a dozen driver safety courses in your file or maybe you're just starting out in the world of commercial driving but in any case, it's time we take a few minutes to consider this short course. The following points will highlight some issues we feel are of particular importance to the weights and measures inspector whether you drive a sedan or SUV doing light duty work or the largest test trucks checking industrial scales or meters.

Develop an Attitude

The foundation for you to be a safe, professional driver is to develop a basic attitude by planting the statement in your mind that, "I am in charge of everything when operating this vehicle." Then, every time you pick up the keys, no matter what your position is on the organizational chart; you will automatically put yourself in charge and take responsibility for everything. Taking charge does not mean you suddenly have new superpowers so you must know your limitations; do not attempt to drive a vehicle or vehicle combination unless you have received the proper training and are confident in your abilities and know when road or weather conditions exceed your safety limits.

Pre-trip Inspection

Taking charge begins with one of the easiest things to skip each day, the pre-trip inspection. I know your policy manual has a section on this and if you are a CDL driver you had to pass the test for your license but I also know a high percentage of drivers fail to perform the pre-trip inspection on a regular basis, myself included. Change this attitude, learn the process, develop a checklist, lead by example and challenge your co-workers, do what it takes to keep the vehicle fleet safe and in good repair because someone's life is at stake and you are in charge.

Loose Items in Cab and Unsecured Loads

Federal regulations prohibit loose items in the cab area of all commercial vehicles and this rule should be part of

your safe driving strategy no matter what size vehicle you operate. Weights and Measures Inspectors carry an incredible amount of equipment with them for daily inspections, most of which would be formidable projectiles in the case of an accident. We could calculate the average down-range velocity of a 50 lb test weight in different speed/vector angle/vehicle mass collision scenarios but why bother; you're not likely to survive the impact in any case. Make sure all of your gear is secured in the cab not only to protect you in a crash but to keep from getting tangled with the vehicle controls.

The danger of loose items is even more important to items carried outside the cab. Gruesome paramedic reports of loose items hitting other drivers or pedestrians are too common and 100% avoidable. It is your responsibility to make sure that all precautions are taken to secure everything on your vehicle before, during and after the trip. Obvious items include: test weights, carts-wheel chocks, safety cones-crane parts, outriggers-fuel hoses and fittings on probers. You should also consider less obvious items like: toolbox doors, mud-flaps, mirrors, auxiliary lights, gravel on the flatbeds and rocks lodged between dual wheel tires. Check it, secure it and check it again whenever you stop for breaks. Do not rely on your supervisor to make things safe on or in your vehicle; you are the one in charge.

Distracted Driving

You don't need hundreds of pages of research documentation by respected universities to tell you that the use of cell phones while driving is the same as driving intoxicated; ten minutes on any highway in the nation should convince you of that new phenomenon. Think about some of the classic examples we sometimes laugh about but are deadly serious:

Eating: The problem is not the act of eating or drinking; most drivers can grab a snack or drink and still maintain complete focus on driving. The problem

comes when the driver tries to wipe mustard from their shirt while balancing a cheeseburger on their knee.

Applying make-up in the mirror at 70 mph- quit laughing, it's not funny. Searching for something in the back seat while negotiating an eight lane intersection- yikes!

Sleeping while driving: Pull over when drowsy, take a break, take a walk, and regain focus before continuing.

Gawking: In some cities a disabled car on the side of the road can affect traffic five miles back because of gawking. Resist the distraction of the visuals that may grab your attention.

Modern technology has added a whole host of new in-cab distractions:

- Dashboard controls from the space shuttle-set the clock in a parking lot not on the road.
- The annoying GPS lady constantly telling you to turn left in 200 feet-talking back to her will do no good.
- Laptop computers and DVD players-drivers deserve whatever penalty society deems appropriate for watching a movie while driving.

Distracted driving is something you need to take a stand on as the person in charge of your vehicle. Make a two way pact with management, your coworkers and your loved ones not to engage in distractive driving habits. It doesn't matter what regulations, policies or bans are in place; what matters is that you don't get distracted while piloting a 2 ton or 25 ton vehicle.

Maintaining Distance

Professional truck driving instructors will stress to a student at every opportunity that maintaining the proper distance between vehicles is one of the most important self-defense strategies a driver can learn. One of the difficulties we have noticed with weights and measure inspectors is that in many cases they are not necessarily hired as professional drivers but learn on-the-

job. New students are always surprised when they realize just how much room you need to stop a fully loaded large capacity scale test truck or a truck-trailer combination with an 800 gallon prover. Drivers must learn that these vehicles are like river barges, slow to accelerate, slow to stop and every twist and turn must be thought out well in advance. Now add snow and ice or other weather difficulties to the mix and there has to be an increase to the comfort zone. Proper distance is not just for highway driving but is also extremely important in congested city driving. Professional drivers will adhere to two particular rules when driving in city traffic. Never lose sight of the bumper

of the car in front of you and never lose sight of the crosswalk when you are the first one at a traffic light. Following these rules will help keep you from crushing the Mini Cooper or the pedestrian who is inadvertently hiding under your grill.

Backing

Accidents while backing are number two on our avoidable crash list. Inspectors routinely back in and around fuel pumps or loadracks, at warehouses or simply pull out of the grocery store parking lots. Each backing situation deserves a different level of caution. Sometimes you can simply get out and survey the area and sometimes you need a spotter to assist you into position.

You should never back-up blindly or rely on a reverse warning beeper and you must use extreme caution when backing at night or when visibility is reduced by weather. The situation associated with the most accidents is when backing from bright sunlight into a dark warehouse or garage. This situation should warrant the assistance of a spotter whenever possible.

Take charge, stay focused and keep the rubber side down.

— Douglas Deiman
Alaska Division of Measurement
Standards/CVE