

4 Tips for Working with Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Agencies to Improve Safety and Bypass Rates

By: Evan Lockridge

Whether you're a trucking fleet executive, safety director, company driver or an owner-operator, if your safety scores aren't where you would like them to be, you're probably not getting bypass green lights as often as you wish. But there is a solution – and it's nearly as close as your back yard.

Commercial vehicle enforcement agencies, especially at the state level, say they are often readily available to help trucking operations improve their level of safety, with real-world advice from the men and women who enforce the rules and regulations every day.

We talked to one current truck safety officer as well as two former ones, who suggested a number of ways truck fleets and owner-operators can work with law enforcement to find out what they need to do to improve safety.

1

Join Your State Trucking Association and Attend Its Events

Every state has a trucking or motor carrier association. And most, if not all, have at least one or two major events each year, attended by not only people in trucking, but also frequently by those in commercial enforcement. In many cases, these events focus on truck and driver safety.

Greg Kindle, a former major with the Missouri State Highway Patrol, said his agency frequently sent officers to events hosted by the Missouri Trucking Association. He's now a regional director for for PrePass Safety Alliance, the non-profit parent of PrePass, overseeing PrePass operations in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

"We made ourselves available to the trucking industry if they had questions about what they needed to do to improve their fleet safety," Kindle said.

According to PrePass Safety Alliance Regional Director Jennifer Brown, who spent more than a decade as a lieutenant with the Arizona Department of Transportation's Enforcement and Compliance Division, this can also include attending state truck driving championships and fleet safety awards.

She said at such events, enforcement agencies will often explain to participating companies what enforcement officers are looking for when it comes to truck inspections.

"I think this is a big benefit for carriers, because everybody is on the same page with those communication lines. Because ultimately safety is everyone's number one priority," Brown said, who oversees PrePass site operations in seven western states.

2

Ask For Truck Inspections

Whether you're a new trucking operation with little safety history or one with a past that might not what you would like it to be, one easy way to improve safety scores is to get more "clean" inspections. But how?

According to Lt. Tracy Barker, an enforcement officer with the Motor Vehicle Division of the Iowa Department of Transportation, it's not uncommon for drivers to come into a scale house and ask for a truck inspection.

However, you need to keep in mind that if an officer is willing to do this, you do run the risk of getting bad marks on an inspection if problems are found. In other words, you want to be sure your truck is in tip-top shape before asking for an inspection at a weigh station or other inspection facility.

But that's not the only way to get more inspections.

Some law enforcement agencies will pay a visit to your fleet, if invited, and perform inspections. If problems

are found, they can tell a fleet what's wrong without there being a penalty. While this won't improve a fleet's Inspection Selection System (ISS) score, which is one factor used to determine whether or not a truck gets a bypass at a weigh station or a highway inspection site, it can help you develop a plan of action so you get better inspection results in the future.

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Other states, such as Iowa, specifically reach out to new carriers, but there is no enforcement penalty for not passing a voluntary inspection, according to Lt. Barker.

"Officers look at how they (the carriers) are operating, what they are doing, how they're running their log books, how much their people are working, and basically break down their whole system and guide them," he said. "If we find something they're doing wrong, we don't write tickets, but rather we guide them to help improve their business model so they are doing things accurate and consistent."

3

Take Advantage of Outreach Programs

Barker said fleets can ask about free outreach programs from law enforcement, which he described as being "big" in Iowa.

"If you're a carrier and call up and say, for instance, 'Hey, we want a load securement program. Can you guys come in and from an enforcement officer's perspective, go through load securement, deliver an instruction message to the drivers and other members of the carrier so that we know exactly what you're looking for? that can be done at no cost to the carrier,'" he said.

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Kindle said enforcement officers can address many issues when meeting with trucking companies and drivers. Sessions can cover topics such as being more aware of four-wheelers and moving around them, brake adjustments, pre-trip inspections, and hours of service, just to name a few.

Brown believes that if fleets used such programs that would help them identify where they're running into problems during truck inspections. "They could pinpoint whether it was the driver or whether it's mechanical and make improvements."

4

Use Data to Begin Discussions

Fleets can also take safety data from inspections as a point to begin discussions with law enforcement about items that are getting their attention during inspections of the carrier's trucks, said Kindle.

This can come from what is recorded in the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Safety and Fitness Electronic Records (SAFER) System, or what they can access free of charge as a PrePass customer in the InfoRM Safety Intelligence system www.prepass.com/inform, which provides carriers with information about their ISS scores that impact bypass rates.

"If companies would take the time and look at that and see where their trucks are being inspected and noticing what those deficiencies are....they are going to improve their ISS score and are more apt to get a bypass at a truck inspection site," said Kindle.

According to Brown, InfoRM is "a very good tool for a carrier to monitor its fleet and drivers on their journeys and can aid in communicating with law enforcement and working together to improve those safety scores."

The ultimate goal of any of these steps is to prevent safety issues at the terminal and take care of them before the truck leaves the premises. Said Kindle: "It's a lot better than handling it out on the road." 