

Safety Shot

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Pre-Trip Inspections

One of the most basic and also the most useful steps you can take to ensure that your trucks are safe for operation is to ensure that all your operators conduct a full and thorough pre-trip inspection on the truck before taking it out of the yard. Of course, these inspections are mandatory, but that does not mean that they always get done as well as they should. And sometimes, I have heard it said that they do not get done at all...

So this month's Safety Shot is two-fold – make sure those pre-trip inspections are being done, and make sure that they are being done well.

Making sure that they are being done will take two things. First of all, you need some sort of record to track that the inspections are being done, and second you need some system in place to make sure that the records actually reflect reality. This is important for two reasons. First, the paperwork is a requirement and second, if there is not a good system in place to ensure the records are accurate, then over time it is likely that "inaccuracies" might creep in...

The best form of record is some sort of check sheet system. In its simplest form, the truck operator simply marks whether or not a given item on the check list is in good shape. There are electronic systems out there that guide the operator through the check list. In one form I have seen, the electronic handheld device is triggered by an RFID tag on the vehicle to bring up a list of items near the tag that need to be checked. The operator cannot move on to the next item until all items on the current list are checked OK or NOT OK. If they are checked NOT OK, then a work order is generated for the mechanic shop to rectify any issues. Depending on the nature of the check, the truck may or may not be taken out of service immediately. Such a system has a lot going for it – it generates the records automatically and makes sure any issues "get into the system," again automatically.

Automatic systems reduce the opportunities for operator error, but of course they do not eliminate them. Put another way, while a good system will help you ensure your trucks are getting properly inspected each time they go into service, that system will also need some additional "reinforcement" to ensure that all is as it should be!

There are a couple of ways you can help the process. First, there is an excellent video (made by the City of Farmington Hills Public Works Department – thanks folks!) which goes through a pre-trip inspection of a snow plow truck. You can find that video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2EMQjVp2U8> I would suggest having all your folk view this video together at a safety meeting. Then you might follow things up with a discussion and a review of the items that are most commonly missed in pre-trip inspection. Finally, you might then go out to the shop and take a look at a truck, doing a pre-trip inspection on the truck, just by way of a reminder for all your folk as to what needs to be done in each and every pre-trip inspection.

What are the most commonly missed items in the pre-trip inspection? Well, the following items appear to be the ones that cause the most trouble:

- Checking the wheels to be sure they are in good shape
- The overall cleanliness of the truck – messes hide mistakes...
- The brakes...
- The emergency kit – is it all there and if there are any items that expire over time, are they within their “use by” date?
- The reflectors – are they clean (they do not work well if covered with dirt!) and are they attached at the right angle?
- The seat belts – there should be no fraying or signs of wear, and they should click into place properly...
- The wheel lug nuts – it sounds almost comical to think that these might not be tightened, but you would be surprised – very surprised in fact if that wheel comes off and overtakes you as you go down the road...
- The paperwork...

Your shop may have your own items that are commonly missed, especially as relates to winter equipment on the truck (the plow, the spreader, the controls, the pavement temperature sensor and so forth).

The pre-trip inspection is a great safety check, but it will only work if it is done, and done correctly, every time.

Stay safe out there...