

Commercial Vehicle Maintenance

Fleet managers know they need a system for maintaining the mechanical condition of their vehicles and that scheduled service reduces breakdowns. When you have fewer breakdowns, it stands to reason that you also reduce the chances of the mechanical malfunction being a contributing cause of an accident/incident.

Accomplished fleet managers point to the necessity of following the regulatory requirements for maintenance and inspections demanded by regulatory agencies such as the Department of Transportation (DOT) and others. As a carrier we encourage our accounts to comply with these organizations.

However, do not overlook what these systems and documents represent for your entity. These systems highlight your efforts to manage the liability within your organization. Your maintenance system and procedures can go a long way in convincing a jury, or a claims handler, or employees & citizens that you intend to have a lawful and safe operation. Even if you don't always meet these expectations, you are trying. This often means the difference between paying a little or paying a very large verdict.

Recordkeeping

When your entity has a major automobile incident, the vehicle will likely be towed and inspected by an outside group with every maintenance record and inspection likely evaluated by the prosecution. Why? They are looking for "less than reasonable" frequency and quality of maintenance, as well as inspections, which may open the door for allegations of negligence.

Keep these records current:

- Scheduled preventive maintenance schedules (intended maintenance & service frequency by vehicle type - should meet/exceed manufacturer recommendations) include lubrication, but also a more ridged service/inspection, such as brakes, tires/wheels, suspension, transmission...
- Preventive maintenance & repair records and vehicle recall repair efforts for each unit.
- Inspection records: annual DOT inspections and post-trip inspections. Consider these as vehicle condition reports (on this day, the vehicle was in good operational condition).
 - A pre-trip inspection is a visual walk-around.
 - Post-trip inspection uses a checklist that is dated and signed, and repairs needed are noted.
 - All reports, including those with no issues, should be turned in to management
 - Any vehicle with dangerous issues should be taken out of service until repaired

Many of these same records should be explored by your accident investigation committee which will be trying to identify any contributing causes of an accident.

Training

Local government Public Works operations, especially smaller departments, often do not have dedicated mechanics and rely on the drivers to perform post-trip inspections, basic maintenance, and basic repairs. Be sure any driver/mechanic is qualified to perform the repair/maintenance that is done in-house.

As a risk management best practice, suggested training topics (may not be all-inclusive):

- Document orientation and training of each employee who has maintenance responsibility
- Performing post-trip inspections
- Brake adjustment/repair and air brake adjustments/certification as applicable
- Steering and suspension
- Tires & wheels
- Equipment tie-downs
- Emergency vehicles (Ambulance, Fire, Law Enforcement...) repair & maintenance should be done by a qualified technician. Specific certifications vary depending on the type of vehicle. If your department does not have a qualified person to perform the repair/maintenance on emergency vehicles, then contact a designated professional.

Below are some sample vehicle inspection forms to assist in establishing or strengthening a maintenance program. It is recommended that you customize the sample forms for each vehicle type.

Sample Forms

[Monthly Commercial Vehicle Maintenance Checklist](#)

[Daily Non-CDL Vehicle Inspection Checklist](#)

[Daily CDL Vehicle Inspection Checklist](#)

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