



Take a walk before you drive

The value of pre-trip inspections

ENSURING YOUR SAFETY

Just as builders know that safe and reliable homes need solid foundations, truck drivers like you know that the foundation of every safe drive is a quality pre-trip inspection. You can do your part in reducing preventable accidents by following structured, predetermined maintenance, inspection, and recordkeeping plans—making you far more likely to catch and correct worn, failed, or incorrectly adjusted components on your truck.

With this guide, we'll help you develop a standard pre-trip inspection routine based on daily checklists of key safety areas. Soon, these inspections will become second nature for you and other drivers throughout your fleet. After all, while both motor carriers and drivers share the responsibility of ensuring fleet safety, ultimately it comes down to drivers like you to make sure that your vehicles are in safe operating condition before each trip.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRE-TRIP INSPECTIONS

Pre-trip inspections are your last chance to spot potentially dangerous safety issues before you hit the road. Before each trip, be sure to inspect your vehicle, note any issues, and report them to maintenance for repairs. Your carrier should have company-established standards for placing vehicles out of service, while also encouraging drivers not to drive if they discover any vehicle deficiencies. No matter how short or routine a trip may be, it's important that any unsafe conditions are corrected before you take to the road.

Beyond the common sense aspect of pre-trip inspections, it's also a legal requirement. According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration Code of Federal Regulations 392.7, no commercial motor vehicle shall be driven unless the driver is satisfied that the following parts and accessories are in good working order:

- Service brakes, including trailer brake connections
- Parking (hand) brake
- Steering mechanism
- Lighting devices and reflectors
- Tires
- Horn
- Windshield wiper(s)
- Rear-vision mirror(s)
- Coupling devices
- Wheels and rims
- Emergency equipment

The safest drivers on the road go above and beyond the requirements, and their driver records reflect that dedication to safety. However, we won't assume—and neither should your carrier—that all of your fellow drivers know how to perform a quality pre-trip inspection. Regardless of experience level, everyone should be encouraged to participate in your carrier's pre-trip inspection training program. These programs provide vital opportunities to gauge your knowledge, and ensure that each inspection is done correctly.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR DURING YOUR PRE-TRIP INSPECTION

Engine compartment and cab

You should start your inspection under the hood and behind the wheel. Though you're likely familiar with your vehicle by this point, don't allow yourself to become complacent. Begin each inspection as though the truck were new to you.

- Check all fluids and fill to proper levels
- Inspect all belts and hoses for wear and proper fit
- Check all components, including air compressor, power steering, gear box, water pump, and steering linkage
- Adjust your windshield wipers, rearview mirror, and horn as needed
- Ensure that your emergency equipment is fully stocked and easily accessible



Brake performance

As you know, catastrophic brake failures such as sudden air loss can send your vehicle out of control. As you check your brakes, also be aware of progressive brake deterioration, which can be just as dangerous because it appears innocuous during normal braking, but may lead to an accident in an emergency braking situation.

- Test your brakes for stopping performance before you enter the highway
- Check to ensure that your brakes are properly adjusted
- Determine if the air system is operating well
- Check that your low air warning devices are functioning
- Stop and check your brake adjustment before entering any severe downgrades

Tire inflation and condition

As you check your tires, look for tread wear, tread and sidewall damage, and air leakage. Worn or deteriorated tires can fail, leading to blowouts. Also, keep in mind that too much tire pressure can be just as dangerous as too little. Beyond improving safety on the road, proper tire inflation promotes fuel savings.

- Monitor your tire inflation and wear
- Maintain correct tire inflation pressures throughout your time on the road
- Check your tire tread depth frequently
- Mount tires that match in size, and pair tires with similar wear in duals

Wheel retention and deterioration

If your wheel components are assembled incorrectly or damaged, the wheel assembly may collapse. In these situations, you're likely to lose control of your truck.

- Inspect all wheels, keeping an eye out for wheel and rim cracks, improperly seated lock rings, rust around wheel lug nuts, missing components, and loose wheel lug nuts after any recent tire changes
- Identify and replace any missing wheel components

Steering system performance

It's important to remember that not all steering system failures are immediate and catastrophic. By watching for the signs of progressive deterioration, such as increased play in the steering wheel, you'll increase the likelihood of stopping potentially catastrophic failures before they happen.

- Check for excessive steering wheel play
- Follow your company's established guidelines for taking your vehicle out of service
- Note any steering deficiencies in writing on your vehicle inspection reports

Trailer coupling

Proper coupling procedures for semi-trailers ensure that the coupling is secure, equipment remains in good order, landing gear remains undamaged, air lines and electric lines are connected, and axle loads are balanced.

- Make sure the coupling components on both your truck and trailer are in good condition
- Adjust the coupler if needed
- Ensure that electric and air lines are properly connected

Lights and reflectors

Due to the length and lower maneuverability of your truck and tractor-trailer combination, other drivers may strike your vehicle simply because they don't see it in time. By inspecting your lights and reflectors and ensuring their adequacy, you can reduce the risk of these accidents.

- Make sure all your lights and reflectors are clean and operable
- Use extra care when pulling low-profile trailers, such as empty flatbed tractors, empty container chassis, construction equipment trailers, or pole trailers

Loads

Heavy, high, and offset loads can lead to rollovers during emergency steering maneuvers or when you're driving at high speed.

- Make sure your vehicle and axle weights are within legal limits
- Know your vehicle's weight rating
- Ensure that your tire ratings and inflations are compatible with the load and driving conditions
- Check that your suspension and coupling ratings are appropriate for the load
- Be sure to properly secure your cargo

As you can imagine, the value of a quality pre-trip inspection far outweighs the potential consequences of ignoring it. While skipping an inspection may simply lead to a fine, it has the potential to extend far beyond that: causing an avoidable accident resulting from undiscovered safety issues. No matter how short your haul may be, you owe it to everyone—yourself, your carrier, and your fellow drivers—to do your part in making the roads safer.

At Sentry, we offer a range of safety resources you can utilize in your daily operations. Reach out to your agent, log on to Sentry Connect, or talk with your Sentry safety services consultant to learn how we can assist you in developing a safety plan that makes sense for your fleet.