

# VEHICLE INSPECTIONS

Vehicle costs are a top expense for nearly every operation. Proper vehicle inspections can lower risk, increase regulatory compliance and save your company money. Inspections must be conducted prior to and immediately after operating any DOT regulated vehicle. Most companies require similar pre-trip and post-trip inspections for all vehicles.

## PRIOR TO YOUR INSPECTION

You must review the previous driver's vehicle inspection for defects. This may be done electronically or via paper form. If the previous driver noted a defect, review the DEFECTIVE ITEMS section of this outline.

## VEHICLE INSPECTIONS

The following is my preferred method for inspecting vehicles - yours may vary. The key is to be consistent and do the inspection the same way, everytime.

### Initial Walk-Around

Start at the driver's door and go around the vehicle counter clockwise looking for any physical damage or mechanical issues. Some companies may have you conduct body inspections and safety inspections separately, follow your company's training and guidance.

Key areas to inspect:

1. Body panels - Check for damage and security
2. Tires - check for
  - a. Proper inflation
  - b. Adequate tread depth
  - c. Rocks between tread that could become a projectile on the road
3. Rims - look for
  - a. Cracks and other damage
  - b. Oil leaking from center hub
4. Brakes
  - a. Visually check brake pads
  - b. Listen for air leaks on equipped vehicles
  - c. Inspect brake lines for rubbing and damage
5. Lug nuts - Verify that they are secure and all present on each tire
6. Look under the vehicle as you go - watch for signs of:
  - a. Leaks - air or fluid
  - b. Broken or damaged suspension components
  - c. Broken or damaged steering components
  - d. Broken or damaged exhaust hangers, exhaust leaks
  - e. Broken or damaged drive shaft
7. Mud flaps, if equipped, should be properly secured

8. Reflectors should be clean and intact
9. Glass (windshield, side and rear windows)
10. External mirrors
11. DOT numbers, if applicable

**ANY BODY DAMAGE MUST BE REPORTED PRIOR TO STARTING THE VEHICLE!**

### **Engine Compartment**

Open the cover and begin your engine compartment inspection. The location of individual items should be covered in training, but if you have questions, ask your fleet manager.

Key areas to inspect:

1. Check all fluid levels
  - a. Oil
  - b. Brake fluid
  - c. Coolant
  - d. Windshield washer fluid
2. Belts should be tight and free of damage
3. Hoses should be intact and free of leaks
4. Alternator(s) and air compressor should be securely mounted
5. Battery should be secure, free of leaks or corrosion with terminals tightly connected
6. There should be no loose components or wires
7. Start the vehicle and listen for any engine noises that sound out of place - this is also a good time if the vehicle is equipped with air suspension to listen for leaks at the back of the vehicle.

### **Lighting**

Lighting inspections are best completed with a partner, when that isn't feasible reverse lights and brake lights will be difficult to check unless backed up against a wall or mirrors have been provided. Never exit a vehicle in gear to check lighting.

I prefer to check lights in the following order

1. Turn on headlights - check
2. Turn on brights - check
3. Left turn signal - check all
4. Right turn signal - check all
5. Hazards - check all
6. Check all parking and clearance lights as you make your way around the vehicle

### **In-Cab Items**

1. Check gauges
  - a. Engine temperature
  - b. Fuel level
  - c. Oil pressure
  - d. Battery gauge
  - e. DEF level (if equipped)
  - f. Air pressure (if equipped)
2. Note and investigate any vehicle warnings
3. Check windshield wipers
4. Check washer fluids
5. Test horn
6. Adjust mirrors
7. Test seat belt

### **Additional Items**

1. Verify location of triangles, fire extinguisher, spare fuses, and first aid kit (if applicable)
2. Check for annual inspection sticker and paperwork
3. Check for insurance and registration, as well as any applicable city or airport permits
4. Verify vehicle has 7 spare logs, 1 spare vehicle inspection, and ELD Instructions (if applicable) - DOT Vehicles
5. Verify ELD is present and operating (if applicable)

### **Brake Test**

Brake tests vary by state and vehicle but follow the same general principles. Use chocks when appropriate and follow the guidance of the state and manufacturer.

Engage the parking brake and put your foot on the service brake. Place the vehicle in gear and slowly release the service brake, the vehicle should not move.

To test the service brake, roll forward slowly and apply the brake, the vehicle should stop without pulling to either side.

### **Air Brakes**

1. Apply the parking brake and press the service brake. Hold for one minute while watching the gauge for loss of air pressure.
2. Pump the service brake until the warning alarm goes off - usually around 60 PSI
3. Continue pumping the brake pedal until the air supply buttons pop out - usually around 30 PSI.
4. Start the vehicle and allow air pressure to build back up to normal levels before continuing.

## **PASSENGER ITEMS**

Some of these items are required and others are best practices, always follow your state and company's guidance for vehicle inspections.

1. Test all doors to make sure they open and close properly
2. If applicable, test handrail
3. Ensure step light works properly
4. Verify all seats are secure
5. Verify that the passenger area is clean and free of garbage or tripping/slipping hazards
6. Ensure the trunk or cargo area is clean and empty
7. Check that emergency exits are properly labeled and secured
8. Put cleaning supplies out of sight
9. Test radio and any applicable audio/visual equipment
10. Stage the vehicle appropriately in accordance with your company policies
11. If applicable, test wheelchair lift and verify location of securement devices
12. If applicable, ensure bathroom is clean and stocked

## **TIPS**

- Allow plenty of time - A proper inspection will take 15-30 minutes depending on the vehicle.
- Always start in the same place and work around the vehicle in the same direction - This helps eliminate missed steps.
- Always check passenger comfort items as well - We sell an experience, not just safe transportation.

## **DEFECTIVE ITEMS**

If a defective item is located during the pre-trip or post-trip inspection, the driver must determine if that defect affects the safe operation of the vehicle, or is likely to cause a mechanical breakdown. If the driver, in their professional opinion, determines either of those to be true, they may not operate the vehicle and must notate the defect on a Driver Vehicle Inspection Report (DVIR). This places the vehicle out-of-service. Many companies also choose to have other defects notated on the same report.

Prior to operating a vehicle placed out-of-service, the company must sign off on the repair as either completed or unnecessary. The next operator must view the report and sign off on the company assessment prior to operating the vehicle.

## **TRAINING**

While CDL drivers must show proficiency in pre-trip inspections in order to obtain their license, for most states, there is no such requirement for non-CDLs. In addition, it may have been several years since an operator received their license. Training drivers how to conduct a proper inspection is thus a must for all operators.

When possible, a properly labeled diagram of the vehicle engine compartment and dashboard can be a great training aid for new drivers. This is particularly true of buses, which can vary greatly in their setup.

**NEVER ASSUME A DRIVER KNOWS HOW TO CONDUCT A PROPER INSPECTION  
ALWAYS TRAIN AND TEST NEW HIRES!**

**QUALITY CONTROL**

Unfortunately, some drivers choose to pencil-whip inspections, putting the public, themselves and their employers at risk. A low cost method of quality control involves simple tracking of garage sale style stickers.

Here is the method that I recommend:

1. Purchase small brightly colored stickers
2. Place a number on the sticker (corresponding to a spreadsheet)
3. Place the sticker on an area of the vehicle to be inspected
  - a. NOTE: The goal is not to hide the sticker, just to make sure the area is checked
4. Note in a spreadsheet where and when the sticker was placed
5. Direct drivers that all such stickers must be reported (text message works great)
6. Any driver who finds a sticker gets entered to win a gift card or other prize
7. Record drivers who operated the vehicle and did not locate the sticker - I recommend mandatory retraining if three or more are missed

**SUMMARY**

Proper vehicle inspections are key to ensuring a safe and positive experience for our guests. By conducting your inspection in the same way every time, you will be more likely to identify any issues with your vehicle. Always follow state, manufacturer, and company guidelines and make sure you're familiar with the vehicle you are operating - if not ask for help.

**NEVER SHORTCUT A VEHICLE INSPECTION - YOUR SAFETY IS TOO IMPORTANT!**