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### Brake Safety Week Results

The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) has released the results of September's Brake Safety Week. During a seven day period inspectors throughout the U.S. and Canada conducted over 34,000 inspections. Although these were the standard CVSA roadside inspections, there was a special emphasis on braking systems. The out-of-service rates for this year are as follows:



As part of this year's Brake Safety Week, inspectors also collected and reported data on brake hoses/tubing.

- 3,914 units had chafed rubber or thermoplastic hose violations
- 4,387 units had kinked rubber or thermoplastic hose violations

Statistically, 24% of the units inspected had either a kinked or chafed air hose somewhere on the unit. The most common driver pre-trip inspection item would be the hoses that connect the tractor and trailer. However, the majority of this type of violation is found under the unit where hose connections are made to the various brake components. Inspection in these areas is not part of even a diligent pre-trip inspection.

Another common brake defect, the one that is usually the cause of an out-of-service inspection result, is brakes that are out of adjustment. On a tractor trailer, two or more brakes out of adjustment will place the unit out-of-service which necessitates a costly road service call to bring the equipment into compliance. Again, brake push rod travel is outside the scope of a driver's pre-trip inspection.

Although it's certain that on the road inspection violations in general can be reduced if drivers conduct thorough pre-trip inspections, when it comes to brakes increased maintenance and shop inspections of equipment may be what's needed

to reduce those violations and resulting out-of-service.

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## What Can You Control?

There isn't a safety director out there who isn't constantly searching for ways to control the outcome of safety related events. It all starts with driver screening and selection. There's a lot of science that goes into that process but to some degree it's also a gut feel process as well. Once the driver is hired and on the road, the focus shifts. Having an effect on what happens out where the rubber meets the road may be difficult, and sometimes even elusive, but it's very important to a motor carrier.

A lot has been written about what motor carriers can and should do to get their CSA scores under control, and that's certainly a good idea. But can a motor carrier really control their individual BASIC scores?

On the one hand, the scores are driven by violations. As their numbers increase your score in that BASIC will follow suit. Maybe. Don't forget, the score isn't a grade derived from your performance, but rather it's measuring your performance relative to other carriers. Many of those other motor carriers have programs in place to improve their CSA performance so your relative ranking is constantly changing as their performance changes.

Have you had the experience of an increasing BASIC score even though you've put programs in place to reduce violations? What's even more frustrating is that those programs have been effective at reducing violations. Do you need to turn the heat up on your program? Is there some sort of systemic failure?

Probably not. A program designed to reduce violations should be judge by how successful it is in reducing those numbers. That's a number you can control and it's the true measure of how effective your programs are. Reduced violations means that your trucks are better maintained and that your drivers are in compliance. And, in the final analysis, that's a good thing and can only result from a strong safety program which is what benefits a motor carrier the most.

Focusing your efforts on the things you can influence directly is the most productive safety program you can have and will result in measurable improvement.

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## Top Safety Advice

What safety tips are on your top ten list? Although safety directors across the country might have a different answer to that question, there would be a lot of repetition in their answers. What if the question was: "what is the single most important safe driving tip?" Again the answers might vary but there does seem to be one defensive driving technique that stands out: following distance.

The importance of maintaining a safe following distance can't be overstated. When you follow the vehicles ahead of you too closely you give up the ability to visualize and react to situations. Your only hope for avoiding a problem or crash is that the person ahead of you doesn't become involved in a problem, and that's a risky choice to make.

The total stopping distance of a tractor trailer is composed of the time it takes to perceive and react to the situation, the time to apply the brakes and have them take hold, and the actual distance it takes to stop the vehicle. For a fully loaded tractor trailer a safe following distance is 6 seconds – more than that allows even more margin for safety.



After a crash a driver may say that the vehicle ahead “unexpectedly slowed or stopped.” There's no way to know where the vehicle ahead of you is going, how observant of traffic they are, or where they'll exit the highway. If you give up following distance you may become a victim of that uncertainty. A six second following distance leaves quite a gap between you and the traffic ahead. That's the space you need to scan the traffic situation ahead, process what's going on, and slow or stop your vehicle before the crash occurs.

Many drivers will object and say that they can't maintain that following distance. They'll state that they must follow closer so that other drivers can't cut in front of them. Drivers who practice maintaining a 6 second following distance will tell you that other drivers don't necessarily cut in all that often, and even if they do they may cut out again looking for a faster lane. If they don't, you can regain following distance with a slight reduction in speed – just a couple miles per hour.

By practicing this you wind up operating in a much safer environment and you avoid traveling with a large bunch of traffic nose to tail. By separating yourself from that situation you ensure that you have the ability to see a problem developing and react to it.

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