



## DOT maintenance and inspections



Every company that has a Department of Transportation (DOT)-regulated fleet must perform to a certain set of standards adopted by the DOT. These standards are used to ensure all vehicles meet and are maintained to minimal safe operating levels. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) regulation 392.7 requires pre-trip inspections, while regulation 396.11 mandates post-trip inspections.

A pre- and post-trip inspection can assist the operator and fleet owner in properly maintaining their fleet. The pre-trip inspection is used by the driver prior to leaving the first location of the day. A post-trip inspection focuses on the problems that may have come up during the vehicle's use that day. Each inspection must be documented, with all deficiencies being documented and corrected prior to the vehicle being ready for future on-road service.

A pre-trip inspection should check the following at a minimum:

- Parking brakes, service brakes, tires and rims.
- Suspension, steering system and fluid levels.
- Belts and hoses, electrical and air lines.
- Coupling devices.
- Wipers, mirrors, horn, seatbelts, gauges and the air brake warning system.
- Emergency kit, lights, reflectors and signals.

Check the same items during a post-trip inspection minus the fluid checks — do not touch anything that might be hot.



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All DOT-regulated vehicles must undergo an annual DOT inspection performed by a certified inspector. A third-party inspector is not required by law; however, it is an industry best practice to use a third-party inspector that is not familiar with the daily vehicle issues that may be overlooked by an in-house inspector or mechanic. Inspections are the essential part of the maintenance readiness of any fleet, no matter the size of the vehicle or the fleet. With a strong preventative maintenance program and daily pre- and post-trip inspections, the annual inspection should be a routine check-and-balance step for properly maintaining all vehicles throughout the year.

The following are a few unpleasant consequences of not having a robust preventative maintenance program:

- Poor vehicle performance, down time from out-of-service issues or violations.
- Unsafe vehicles on the road can cause accidents.
- DOT violations and citations due to mechanical defects.
- Untimely breakdowns that prevent proper workflow.
- Larger defects from ignored smaller issues over time.

Records of all maintenance, repairs and inspections are to be maintained per 49 CFR 396.3. The following is a list of required records.

- All identifying information for the vehicle, including company number, serial number, make, model, year and tire size.
- The maintenance schedule highlighting the due date and type of maintenance and inspections to be carried out.
- All maintenance, repair and inspection records indicating the date and nature of each.

The owner of the vehicle is responsible for keeping all records for one year and maintained for six months after the vehicle has left the owners control (sale, trade-in, etc).

### FIVE ATTRIBUTES OF TOP-TIER FLEETS

1. Regular reminders on safe driving policies, including reinforcing the issue of distracted driving.
2. Using proactive systems such as cameras, collision mitigation and adaptive safety systems to assist in driving safely.
3. Tracking and requiring controls for issues such as driver fatigue and substance abuse.
4. Regular defensive driving training.
5. Maintains both driver and vehicle readiness levels to the highest standards.

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